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Jennifer Anne Banks  
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PRINCIPAL INFLUENCE ON COLLECTIVE EFFICACY: A SINGLE CASE STUDY  
LOOKING AT PRINCIPAL EFFICACY INFLUENCE ON AN ELEMENTARY SCHOOL  
THROUGH THE PERSPECTIVE OF TEACHERS

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A Dissertation Submitted to the Faculty of  
Old Dominion University in Partial Fulfillment of the  
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Approved by:

Karen L. Sanzo (Chair)

Jonna Bobzien (Member)

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## **ABSTRACT**

### **PRINCIPAL INFLUENCE ON COLLECTIVE EFFICACY: A SINGLE CASE STUDY LOOKING AT PRINCIPAL EFFICACY INFLUENCE ON AN ELEMENTARY SCHOOL THROUGH THE PERSPECTIVE OF TEACHERS**

Jennifer Banks  
Old Dominion University, 2019  
Committee Chairperson: Dr. Karen L. Sanzo

This study explored ways in which self-efficacy beliefs and actions of a principal contributed to the shaping of school's collective efficacy through teachers' perceptions. A general qualitative methods approach was used. The study featured a single embedded case design highlighting one high-poverty school achieving state accreditation standards for student proficiency levels in English and math. The study population consisted of 14 elementary school teachers in a district in a state in the mid-Atlantic region. Data were collected through a survey, semi-structured interviews, and a focus group to answer the following research questions: (1) What experiences/elements were influential in developing the school's collective efficacy? (2) How has the self-efficacy of the principal contributed to the school's collective efficacy and influenced achievement?

The major purpose of this study was to seek understanding of how the self-efficacy beliefs and actions of a principal contributes to the shaping of a school's collective efficacy through teachers' perceptions. Two major themes and five subthemes were revealed by the research and concluded with implications for practice and research. Seven significant findings resulted from this work and illuminated the potential for principal development to support the building of collective efficacy of elementary school principals.

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I dedicate this dissertation to those individuals whose continued encouragement and support helped me make it to the finish line. Most importantly, I would not have made it here without the person who never lets me quit, my husband, Roy. Without your support this never would have been possible because when things seemed unbearable and I was ready to throw in the towel, you were always there to pick me up. You helped me see things through a different perspective when I was frustrated or being way too hard on myself. You never complained when I had to dedicate time to this journey and missed out on events and functions, or just quality time with you. You willingly did whatever was needed to make sure I had the ability to succeed. I thank you for all this and more and I hope that I made you proud.

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## **CHAPTER I**

### **INTRODUCTION**

The role of a principal as an instructional leader focuses predominantly on student achievement through the creation of relational and collaborative environments where one can organize, direct, share opportunities and decision-making, and motivate others (McCormick, 2001; Paglis, 2010). A key variable affecting teacher and leader functioning in this dynamic environment is collective efficacy (McCormick, 2001). Collective efficacy is based on the idea that teachers believe they can ensure that all students in a school have the opportunities provided to them to succeed through a collaborative approach (Goddard, 2001; Sehgal, Nambudiri & Mishra, 2017). According to Schunk (2016), instructional self-efficacy and collective self-efficacy, which have been studied with teachers, bear a positive relation to student learning and achievement. High self-efficacy in teachers results in increased student achievement, as a teacher's self-efficacy affects instruction because efficacious teachers are better at helping to promote student learning (Schunk, 2016). Principals also play a role in the building of teacher efficacy (Sehgal, et al., 2017; Tschannen-Moran, Hoy & Hoy, 1998). When an increase in teacher efficacy occurs, higher levels of collective efficacy within a school are also obtained, illustrating a reciprocal impact on principal self-efficacy (Tschannen-Moran & Gareis, 2007).

Since school principals are very important to the success of children in schools, “we have little empirical evidence about how principals with high self-efficacy influence the collective efficacy in their schools” (Versland & Erikson, 2017). While research has begun to understand leaders' contributions to collective efficacy, through both positive and negative aspects, there is more to learn from highly efficacious principals' behaviors in relation to collective efficacy (Versland & Erikson, 2017). Bandura's (1993) research shows that obstacles such as race and low socioeconomic status (SES) can be overcome when a school operates with high levels of

collective efficacy. Versland & Erikson (2017) further supports this idea suggesting “collective efficacy has enormous potential to positively influence student growth and level the playing field for students in poverty.” Knowing this should lead researchers towards discovering the behaviors and actions of principals that lead to more efficacious teachers resulting in increased student achievement, as there is a limited amount of research that examines how principal efficacy and actions affect a school’s collective efficacy, and ultimately influence student achievement (Versland & Erikson, 2017).

### **Purpose of Study**

Versland & Erikson (2017) indicate that “studies have examined the beliefs and actions of self-efficacious principals from the principals’ points of view, yet few studies have examined the phenomenon through the perspectives of teachers.” This single case study investigated the phenomenon through the lens of teachers. School teachers’ perspectives were used to examine the actions and efficacy beliefs of a school principal. Drawing from Bandura’s (1997) social cognitive theory with an emphasis on collective efficacy, this study aimed to examine how the beliefs and actions of a school principal contributes to the shaping of collective efficacy in a high-poverty school while providing educational possibilities that improve teaching and learning. The study sought to answer the following questions:

#### **Research Questions:**

1. What experiences/elements were influential in developing the school’s collective efficacy?
2. How has the self-efficacy of the principal contributed to the school’s collective efficacy and influenced achievement?

## **Rationale and Significance**

Accountability standards for student achievement have risen over the last two decades with a focus on effectiveness of school staff through standard testing scores of students bearing weight on teacher evaluations. A way to increase student achievement and ensure opportunities for student success and teacher effectiveness is through a collaborative approach (Goddard, 2001; Sehgal et al., 2017). A key approach to create this environment for success is through principal leadership (McCormick, 2001). In addition, Bandura's (1993) research proves that students of low SES tend to have lower achievement capacity, as they have needs outside of the school that must also be overcome although a school functioning with high collective efficacy can help to overcome those deficits. Versland & Erikson (2017) support this idea by stating that "collective efficacy has enormous potential to positively influence student growth and level the playing field for students in poverty." Research on ways principals build high collective efficacy is limited at this time and work needs to be done to increase this knowledge. In this study, I explored elementary school teachers' perspectives of their principal's influence on building collective efficacy. I seek to provide further research in the area of collective efficacy for principal development.

## **Definition of Key Terms**

The definition of key terms is included for readers to become acquainted with unfamiliar or unknown terms that will help to promote understanding and comprehension.

**Self-efficacy-** a belief about one's own ability to successfully perform a task or achieve a goal.

**Leadership Efficacy-** the beliefs and actions of a leader to accomplish results in an organization.

**Collective Efficacy-** a belief about an organization's ability to collaboratively and successfully perform a task or achieve a goal.

**Teachers-** members of the staff influencing instruction and performance. Examples in this study were classroom content teachers, reading and math specialists, interventionists, special education and resource teachers.

### **Limitations**

Two specific limitations of this study are highlighted. The first limitation relates to the size of the participant population. Although 36% of the teacher population at the school participated in individual interviews, perspectives from those that did not were only gained through the focus group, if they chose to participate. The second limitation was associated with the survey methodology as there is the possibility for inaccuracies of self-reported data. The researcher must assume that the responses are accurate and true.

### **Delimitations**

Literature documents that obstacles such as race and low SES can be overcome when a school operates with high levels of collective efficacy (Bandura, 1993); hence, the researcher chose to restrict the study to examining schools that reached the state achievement standards for accreditation and were a low SES school. Convenience sampling was used to implement this study in one school district and at one elementary school from a district in a state in the mid-Atlantic region and did not include middle schools or high schools, thus delimiting the participant sites. The collected evidence may be limited in its application to other schools or districts.

## **Summary**

School principals play a vital role in the success of children in schools. Accountability standards for schools have increased over the last two decades and the role of the principal has evolved from controlling the operations of the school to that of an instructional leader. Principals are beginning to provide experiences to shape the collective efficacy of the school. Research suggests various types of provided experiences can increase collective efficacy, and the principal is highly responsible for this development. Even with this knowledge a gap exists in determining how a principal employs these experiences to develop the collective efficacy of the school while increasing achievement, especially through the teacher perspective in a qualitative manner. By hearing the teachers' perspectives in terms of what they have experienced and perceive to be influential in building collective efficacy by the principal in their school, it is my goal to link the research of building collective efficacy and increasing student achievement with the reality of how this occurs within a school building for practical use in the field of education, in addition to future studies.

## **Overview of Literature**

The literature review for this study begins with understanding self-efficacy and the experiences that can foster efficacy within individuals. Social cognitive theory is discussed as it provides the theoretical framework for the building of self-efficacy. This study also explored literature related directly to the role of self-efficacy in teaching and learning and how it can be fostered by direct actions of the principal resulting in increased achievement. The next two sections outline leader efficacy; moreover, they provide an understanding of how leaders self-efficacy links to their performance and influences their behaviors, thus impacting the

environment and collective efficacy. The last section discusses collective efficacy and its association with student achievement.

### **Overview of Methodology**

This study employed a qualitative methods approach to collecting data through interviews and a focus group. One district in a state in the mid-Atlantic region was selected for the study. The study site was chosen through convenience sampling and participants within the site volunteered to be a part of the study through the use of snowball sampling. Social cognitive theory was included in the literature as this philosophy is applicable in this study of collective efficacy development. The more we learn about principal behavior and collective efficacy, the better we can develop principals who can lead by building collective efficacy and influence student achievement. The interviews and focus group were informed by perspectives of the teachers and represent the basis for thematic development when coding the data. The validity of the study was demonstrated through the use of pseudonyms to protect participant confidentiality, member checking of interview transcripts, and the triangulation of the data.

### **Organization of the Study**

This study is organized into five chapters. Chapter I provides an introduction as to the reasoning and importance of this study, the research questions that will be answered, and an overview of the literature and methodology. Next, Chapter II contains a review of the abundance of literature on social cognitive theory, significant to the development of collective efficacy and the role of principals in building collective efficacy within schools. Chapter III presents a step-by-step methodology on site and participant selection and the collection and analysis of data. The examination of the data for themes was described in Chapter IV. Lastly, Chapter V provides



a summary of the findings in addition to implications for practice and research. The references used in this study and the appendices culminate the research study.

## **CHAPTER II**

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

#### **Overview**

In this chapter, I establish a review of the theoretical literature that supports the theoretical framework related to the context of this research. For the purposes of this study, I specifically explore Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory including (a) self-efficacy and its sources, (b) the role of self-efficacy in teaching and learning, (c) the role of collective efficacy with the school as an organization, and (d) the role of leadership efficacy in the form of the principal. These concepts will be presented to answer three guiding questions that will be presented in the introduction of the study.

#### **Introduction**

"Self-efficacy beliefs are excellent predictors of individual behavior" (Tschannen-Moran & Gareis, 20014). These beliefs play a role in the field of education through collective efficacy and principal self-efficacy. Explicit experiences and actions can be fostered through a principal to increase collective efficacy within a school. While Tschannen-Moran & Gareis, (2004) suggest self-efficacy beliefs predict individual behaviors, Ross, Hogaboam-Gray, & Gray (2003) further develop the idea indicating that collective teacher efficacy is a powerful predictor of student achievement. Bandura (1993), Goddard, Hoy, & Hoy (2000) and Goddard's (2001) research supports the relationship between collective efficacy and student achievement; although Goddard, Goddard, Sook Kim, & Miller's (2015) later research states "the manner in which leaders and teachers work together to improve instruction and collective efficacy beliefs deserves more attention." Guiding questions for my research include what experiences/elements were

influential in developing the school's collective efficacy? How has the self-efficacy of the principal contributed to the school's collective efficacy and influenced achievement?

According to Fancera & Bliss (2011), "the understanding of specific principal instructional leadership functions that are associated with improved collective teacher efficacy may provide scholars and practitioners with a better understanding of how a focus on the technical core of schools improves school achievement." Major influences on efficacy beliefs are explained through social cognitive theory by Bandura (1977, 1986, 1997) as an interpretation of the four sources of information: mastery experience, physiological arousal, vicarious experience, and verbal persuasion (Goddard, Hoy, & Hoy, 2000). These sources of information based on Bandura's (1977, 1986, 1997) social cognitive theory will be covered later in the literature review section.

The purpose of this literature review is to provide a structure for understanding the role efficacy plays in schools and how self-efficacy can be shaped by experiences provided by the principal. This review initially sought to address the question: what experiences can be fostered through a principal to increase collective efficacy? As this question is answered, the changing capacity of self-efficacy to collective efficacy in teaching is explored to gain an understanding of what role they play and why they are important. The next part of the review investigates leadership efficacy and its function in the leadership process as a principal. Following leadership efficacy, in the form of principal efficacy, the review examines the way principal efficacy influences collective efficacy, thereby increasing student achievement. Lastly, this review is concluded by examining the theoretical framework of Bandura's (1977, 1986, 1997) social cognitive theory including the four sources of self-efficacy development.

## **Efficacy**

### **Social Cognitive Theory**

Social cognitive theory is the lens through which this study is being analyzed and provides the framework to examine how principals can shape the collective efficacy in their schools. Research spanning the last twenty years relevant to Bandura's (1977, 1986, 1997) social cognitive theory has been used, evolved, and applied to the construct of teacher efficacy (Goddard et al., 2000). Efficacy can be developed over time through experiences. Bandura (1986, 1997) suggested that there are four sources of self-efficacy information: mastery experience, vicarious experience, social persuasion, and emotional arousal. Just as these sources are critical for individuals, they are also fundamental in the development of collective teacher efficacy (Goddard et al., 2000). Self-efficacy is informed by the gathering of information through experiences (Bandura, 1997). Prussia, Anderson, & Manz (1998), state that self-efficacy results from the acquisition of cognitive, social, linguistic, or physical skills through personal and/or vicarious experience (Bandura, 1982) and learning occurs enactively through actual performances and vicariously by observing models (Schunk, 2016). Dwyer (2017) explains that according to Bandura (1997) self-efficacy is shaped by four types of experiences: mastery experiences, vicarious experiences, verbal persuasion, and physiological and emotional states. Goddard et al., (2000), suggests that although all four sources of experiences are pivotal in the creation of collective teacher efficacy, cognitive processing and interpretation of the information is critical. Principals can provide their faculties with all four sources of experience to develop self-efficacy and, subsequently, collective efficacy (Bandura, 1977).

**Mastery experiences.** Mastery experiences are content specific in one environment providing direct evidence that an individual can succeed at a single given task (Goddard et al.,

2000). People naturally reflect back on their past successes and failures in assessing their capability to perform (Paglis, 2010). These experiences increase or decrease self-efficacy depending upon how the individual processes the information from the experience (Goddard et al., 2000). Individuals who process information from an experience in a positive manner may take on new challenges that further heighten their self-efficacy, while those that negatively process experiences may decrease their self-efficacy (Goddard et al., 2000).

Mastery experience is an important way to build collective efficacy in schools (Goddard, 2001). As a group, teachers experience successes which can build a strong belief in the sense of collective efficacy, and failures will undermine the organization's collective efficacy (Huber, 1996; Levitt & March, 1996). A contradiction to frequent, easy success is its ability to produce discouragement when failure occurs. If success, however, is frequent and too easy, failure is likely to produce discouragement (Huber, 1996; Levitt & March, 1996). Huber (1996) and Levitt & March (1996) state that experience in overcoming difficulties through persistent effort creates a strong sense of collective efficacy.

**Vicarious experiences.** A second level of experience, vicarious experiences, are formed by the observation of social models performing tasks or demonstrating mastery of a task (Dwyer, 2017). Just as students observe teachers as models, individuals can discern the skills and behaviors necessary for mastery by observing successful models similar to the observer (Schunk, 2016). These types of experiences result in increased self-efficacy and become more impactful to self-efficacy if individuals can observe another individual modeling an undaunted attitude and diligent perseverance no matter what challenges are presented (Dwyer, 2017). Conversely, observing similar individuals to oneself fail despite high effort can negatively impact self-efficacy by confirming internal doubts (Bandura, 1989). Individual teacher efficacy can be

effectively created through vicarious experience and modeling, but these strategies also promote collective teacher efficacy (Goddard et al., 2000).

Sources of efficacy information identified for individuals in social cognitive theory can be seen as sources of collective efficacy information (Goddard et al., 2000). Teachers do not rely solely on direct experience; they listen to stories about achievements and successes of their colleagues and other schools to inform collective efficacy (Goddard et al., 2000). Goddard et al. (2000) provides an example of how achievements and successes of other schools influence collective efficacy stating that a school that responds to declining achievement scores by implementing a curricular reform that was effective in a neighboring district is engaged in a self-regulatory process that is informed by the vicarious learning of its members (Goddard et al., 2000). Examples such as this one reaffirms the beliefs of social cognitive theory about the significance of vicarious learning and self-regulation at the organizational level, but we must recognize that organizations work through the actions of individuals (Goddard et al., 2000). Organizations learn through the observation of other organizations (Huber, 1996).

**Verbal persuasion.** A third experience shaping self-efficacy is verbal persuasion. Verbal persuasion is one's abilities or capacity, which is often provided through evaluative feedback, and can help develop skills or attributes, particularly in the early stages of skill development (Bandura, 1997). This type of self-efficacy enhancement can be precarious, and results can be contradictory, if the persuasion does not remain in the bounds of realistic appraisal of one's abilities (Dwyer, 2017). When persons overestimate their ability to perform a task, they may place themselves in situations above their actual abilities, resulting in failure (Bandura, 1997). When this occurs, self-efficacy can be lowered due to experienced failure. Verbal persuasion, when used to negatively assess one's abilities or skill, can significantly decrease self-

efficacy. Dwyer (2017) explains that when verbal persuasion is used to negatively assess a person's abilities and harsh criticism is used that lacks constructive feedback, an individual can lose self-efficacy, motivation, and aspiration. This results in individuals avoiding challenges and competency building opportunities due to low self-efficacy, whereas mastering a challenging situation results in increased self-efficacy (Bandura, 1997).

Verbal persuasion, or the assurance by others to attain a goal, can achieve a good outcome and bolsters self-efficacy (Fitzgerald & Schutte, 2010). Goddard et al. (2000) explain that talks, workshops, professional development opportunities, and feedback about achievement can influence teachers. Social persuasion is another means of strengthening a faculty's conviction that they have the capabilities to achieve their goals, resulting in increased effort that leads to persistence and ultimately problem-solving and success (Goddard et al., 2000). "Verbal persuasion alone is not likely to be a powerful change agent but coupled with models of success and positive direct experience, it can influence the collective efficacy" of a faculty (Goddard et al., 2000, p. 484).

**Physiological and emotional state.** The last experience to shape self-efficacy is the physiological and emotional state, also called affective states by Goddard et al. (2000). Bandura (1997) explains that during intense or stressful situations, heightened anxiety or tension is experienced by individuals. This response is not limited to only individuals; organizations react in the same ways (Goddard et al., 2000). When organizations are confronted by such forces, vulnerability and ineptitude may be felt in such a state, resulting in less efficacious organizations reacting in dysfunctional ways, which reinforce their basic dispositions of failure (Goddard et al., 2000). The opposite is true of efficacious organizations, as they learn to adapt and cope and are able to tolerate this negative affective state without severe strain (Goddard et al., 2000).

Similar to all efficacy-shaping experiences, one's physical or emotional state alone does not determine self- efficacy; rather, how one processes the information from the physical and emotional state of being is the determining factor (Bandura, 1989). In Dwyer's (2017) research he states that Federici and Skaalvik (2012) found that principals with low self-efficacy tended to have higher levels of exhaustion than their more efficacious counterparts. The researchers found that more exhausted principals evaluated themselves more negatively (Dwyer, 2017). This idea could also be related to how one approaches new ideas being presented for implementation, when they already feel overwhelmed and overworked. The affective state of an organization has much to do with how challenges are interpreted by organizations (Goddard et al., 2000). New ideas being presented for implementation by a low-efficacious principal may not be received or perceived in a positive manner, thus lowering self-efficacy of the individual solely based on the processing of new information. Goddard et al., (2000) explains that this receiving or perception of information may lead to misinterpretation, overreaction, underreacting, or not reacting at all. "Because physiological and affective states (such as a very high level of arousal or negative mood) can influence perception of efficacy, reduction or re-interpretation of such states can lead to higher perceived self-efficacy" (Fitzgerald & Schutte, 2010).

### **Self-Efficacy**

#### **Teacher Self-Efficacy**

Teacher effectiveness in the form of self-efficacy can play a prominent role in increasing student achievement and researchers have established a relationship between teacher efficacy and teacher behaviors that foster student achievement over the last two decades (Hoy, Sweetland, & Smith, 2002). This link of self-efficacy and the goal of increased student achievement can be explained through Bandura's (1997) social cognitive theory. Bandura (1997) describes efficacy



as a belief about one's own ability, self-efficacy, to perform a task or achieve a goal (Wahlstrom, Louis, Leithwood, & Anderson, 2010). Klassen, Tze, Betts, & Gordon (2011) define teacher efficacy as the confidence teachers possess about their individual and collective ability to influence student learning. Research points to these two kinds of efficacy as bearing an impact on teaching, learning, and student achievement and are best explained by Wahlstrom, Louis, Leithwood, & Anderson (2010) by referring to individual self-efficacy as a sense that "I have the capacity to do this," while collective efficacy refers to "together we have the capacity to do this." Individuals who have a low sense of self-efficacy also have low aspirations and weak commitments to the goals they choose to pursue (Walumbwa & Hartnell, 2011).

As stated previously, self-efficacy can be defined as the sense of individuals' capabilities regarding how well they can perform actions needed in order to handle probable situations (Kurt, Duyar, & Çalik, 2011). Bandura (1997) described individuals who have a low sense of self-efficacy as also having low aspirations and weak commitments to the goals they choose to pursue (Walumbwa & Hartnell, 2011). Because individuals with high self-efficacy deal more effectively with difficulties and persist in the face of failure, they are more likely to achieve expected outcomes and thus derive satisfaction from their jobs (Liu, Siu, & Shi, 2010). According to Kurt, Duyar, & Çalik, (2011), Bandura (2001) states that efficacy beliefs play an important role in both individual and group motivation since people have to rely, at least, to some extent, on others to accomplish their tasks. Self-efficacy in individuals directly impacts the collective efficacy of an organization, and these are both affected and influenced by leadership efficacy.

Organizations, especially in education, are becoming more collaborative and leaders have a direct effect on collective efficacy (Sehgal et al., 2017; Tschannen-Moran et al., 1998).

Efficacy determines how much effort people will expend and how long they will persist in the face of failure or difficulty—the stronger the feelings of efficacy, the greater the persistence (Wahlstrom et al., 2010). Teacher efficacy is context-specific, and teachers do not feel equally efficacious in all teaching situations; there are strengths and weaknesses (Goddard et al., 2000). Because individuals with high self-efficacy deal more effectively with difficulties and persist in the face of failure, they are more likely to achieve expected outcomes (Liu et al., 2010). Teachers may not be proficient in every area of their career, but self-efficacy can determine the effort and persistence a person or employee will expend on tasks (Wahlstrom et al., 2010).

The current goal of educators to increase student achievement may be reached when teacher's self-efficacy in instructional performance is fostered through specific and direct actions utilized by principals operating as instructional leaders. In the changing world of education, efficacy plays a role in many areas, including the implementation of new programs and school improvement processes (Wahlstrom et al., 2010). Dwyer (2017) states that individuals who focus upon successful experiences rather than failed attempts have higher self-efficacy than those who focus more on failures (Bandura, 1989).

### **Collective Efficacy**

#### **Collective Efficacy of a School**

Principals' beliefs and attributions, or sense of efficacy, influence their behavior and as leaders in the school, make an impact on the teachers by their behaviors (Autry, 2010). A principal has the ability to influence a collaborative environment focused on what the organization can do as a whole versus individually to promote student learning. Autry (2010) explains that differences in principal behavior and efficacy will lead to differences in teachers' collective behavior and efficacy while differences in teachers' sense of collective efficacy will

impact student achievement. Schools with lower SES generally have low collective efficacy because students from low SES backgrounds tend to have greater difficulties that begin outside of school, and teachers do not always believe they can overcome those needs (Hoy et al., 2002). Hoy, Sweetland, & Smith (2002) suggest that negative external influences can be overcome when collective efficacy is high; therefore, teachers in a school believe they can reach their students regardless of external factors. When the majority of teachers are highly committed to student academic performance, the climate of the school will pressure teachers to persevere in their educational efforts to provide students the environment to reach success (Hoy et al., 2002). This relationship is based on the theoretical framework of Bandura's theories on self- and collective efficacy and student achievement (Autry, 2010).

Findings in a study by Wahlstrom et al. (2010) emphasize principals' sense of collective efficacy as a key to leadership influence on teaching and learning. They found that effective leadership depends on expectations, efficacy, and engagement, and the three concepts do not denote isolated dimensions of leadership; rather, they imply complementary relationships that sustain effective leadership at all levels (Wahlstrom et al., 2010). That is, "leadership self-efficacy" may simply be a general category that is made up of several discrete belief structures reflecting confidence in the ability to enact distinct leadership activities — belief structures that have differential relations with effectiveness criteria (Anderson, Krajewski, Goffin, & Jackson, 2008). These leadership activities or belief structures influence the building of collective efficacy.

Analysis of data by Sehgal, Nambudiri, & Mishra (2017) revealed a positive correlation between principal leadership and teacher self-efficacy emphasizing the important role played by the principal in shaping the self-efficacy beliefs of a teacher. Additional findings from their

study suggest that schools can enhance teacher effectiveness through self-efficacy beliefs by demonstrating the importance and providing an environment for collaboration among peers and support from the principal (Sehgal et al., 2017). When collaboration among peers occurs, self-efficacy is raised collectively. Polm (2016) states that research supports teacher efficacy as linked very closely to student achievement and principal efficacy to teacher and collective efficacy. The combination of these efficacy links contributes to a school's culture toward student achievement (Polm, 2016). A key to the creation of this type of environment is influenced through the role a principal may play in support of the growth of their teachers.

Self-efficacy is adaptable to human resource development and management for performance improvement (Luthans & Peterson, 2002). When teachers have an emotional tie to their principals, are able to participate through shared or distributed leadership, and believe their principal has a vested interest in their development, they are more likely to respond positively and become more effective demonstrating a reciprocal nature of building self-efficacy, resulting in higher collective efficacy (Luthans & Peterson, 2002). Opportunities provided by leaders to allow followers to become emotionally and cognitively engaged can lead to enhancement of self-efficacy. In a study by Luthans & Peterson (2002), they suggest that managers must help to create an environment in which their employees become both emotionally and cognitively engaged and are provided with information and feedback. Employees who do not believe themselves able to have impact are less likely to be proactive (Hartog & Belschak, 2012). A collaborative environment with a shared vision toward a common goal dependent on the engagement of all individuals as a group creates the opportunity to increase collective efficacy. Hoy et al. (2002) support this understanding as they explain that because of the influence of a

faculty with high collective efficacy, a teacher with average self-efficacy beliefs is likely to apply more of herself when collaborating with coworkers.

## **Leadership Efficacy**

### **Principal Efficacy**

Not only do teachers need support to feel successful and efficacious in their work, but the same is also true for principals (Wahlstrom et al., 2010). Leadership self-efficacy defined by McCormick (2001) is “one’s self-perceived capability to perform the cognitive and behavioral functions necessary to regulate group process in relation to goal achievement.” “Principal self-efficacy and its importance to school reform remains an under-researched phenomenon” (Versland & Erikson, 2017). Leadership self-efficacy is critical to the leadership process because it affects the goals a leader selects, leader motivation, development of functional leadership strategies, and the skillful execution of those strategies (McCormick, 2001). The operation of a school and influence on staff can be directly influenced by the self-efficacy of its leader. Tschannen-Moran & Gareis (2004) state that “principals with a strong sense of self-efficacy have been found to be persistent in pursuing their goals but are also more flexible and more willing to adapt strategies to meeting contextual conditions.” A leader with low self-efficacy may shy away from changes that promote the betterment of the organization. Wahlstrom et al. (2010), explain that efficacy is fundamental to moving from the desire for change to actual changes in behavior.

School improvement processes illustrate an example of change whereas a principal possessed of strong efficacy beliefs will be more likely than others to undertake and persevere (Wahlstrom et al., 2010). A leader who possesses high self-efficacy can become more confident when a collaborative environment with a shared vision and mission is created. Wahlstrom et al.

(2010), elaborate that even leaders who possess a strong sense of efficacy benefit from supportive conditions in which they work collaboratively towards clear, common goals with district personnel, other principals, teachers and are thus more confident in their leadership.

McCormick's (2001) research explains that leadership can be thought of as a particular kind of human functioning when applied to Bandura's social cognitive model. McCormick (2001) states that Bandura's social cognitive model implies that to fully understand the leadership process, three categories of leadership variables consisting of leader cognition, leader behaviors, and the leadership environment must be considered with the most important, leader cognition, being the individual's self-efficacy for the leadership task. These categorical variables do not operate in isolation but as intertwining variables. How leaders feel about themselves and their performance influences their behaviors, which then impacts the overall environment.

Successful leadership also involves using social influence processes to organize, direct, and motivate the actions of others to accomplish results through their effects on follower behavior (McCormick, 2001; Paglis, 2010). Leaders can affect followers' behaviors through social influence and increase or decrease their followers' self-efficacy resulting in achievements or failures within the organization. Principals' self-efficacy beliefs for instructional leadership and management skills provide insight into the underlying capabilities of principals to facilitate an effective teaching and learning environment, provide instructional leadership, manage the operational processes, and promote a positive school culture (Kessinger, 2015). A principal plays a complex role in the operation and leadership potential of a school, and their self-efficacy can be furthered heightened or lessened by their own staff.

Tschannen-Moran and Gareis' (2007) study on cultivating principals' sense of self-efficacy speaks of the development of principals' self-efficacy beliefs as being complex and

reciprocal in nature. Leaders and followers enhance or hinder the growth of self-efficacy between each other. This is illustrated when a principal with high self-efficacy leads in ways to support teachers and stakeholders, while those same teachers and stakeholders will help the principal feel a greater sense of efficacy by providing positive support of the principal (Autry, 2010). This is just one theoretically based idea that supports the development of a collaborative environment fostered by the leader, with the goal to promote student learning and achievement. Leadership literature has yet to provide a firm theoretical explanation of why certain principal leadership properties promote student learning and with what mechanisms principals contribute to student learning (Kurt et al., 2011).

### **Principal Efficacy and Collective Efficacy**

Barriers to achievement can be overcome and improvement of student learning can be successful through a principal focused on the building of collective efficacy (Fancera & Bliss, 2011). Collaboration is an opportunity that can be provided by a strong instructional leader influencing collective efficacy, as this is a strategy employed for instructional improvement (Goddard, Goddard, Sook Kim, & Miller, 2015). In addition, when teachers have the opportunity to participate in shared and distributed leadership practices including the development of processes, goals, and decision making, collective efficacy is also strengthened (Ross, Hogaboam-Gray, & Gray, 2003; Goddard, 2002; Luthans & Peterson, 2002). In a study by Al-Mahdy, Emam, & Hallinger (2018) it was illustrated that “the effects of principal leadership on teacher commitment were attained both directly and indirectly through practices that shaped the collective efficacy of their teachers.” Some of these practices that a principal can use to sway teachers to become effective in a collaborative approach can be through personnel supervision and staff development processes (Ross et al., 2003). Group success can be created

through direct behaviors and practices of an active principal attempting to influence the processes of the task-performing group (McCormick, 2001).

### **Collective Efficacy and Student Achievement**

Relationships between collective efficacy and student achievement have been found by researchers including Bandura (1986, 1993, 1997) and Wahlstrom et al. (2010). Through Bandura's research (1993), collective efficacy beliefs were proven to positively influence the culture of a school through the commitment and actions of staff to ensure all students have the opportunity for success. This leads to the belief that external factors such as low SES and race can be overcome (Versland, 2017).

Differentiating instructional practices to reach all students, a goal in collaborative teaching practices resulting in high levels of collective efficacy, can also reduce the effects of poverty (Goddard, Hoy, & Hoy, 2004). Hoy et al. (2002) explain that structured environments, characterized by high collective efficacy, where achievable goals are set, have high levels of achievement, even controlling for SES. Bandura's (1993) research findings on collective efficacy and student achievement further support the construct of collective efficacy being related to student achievement and collective efficacy having a greater effect on achievement than SES. Goddard, Hoy, & Woolfolk Hoy (2000) furthered the research finding that achievement in mathematics and reading positively related to collective efficacy. In addition, Hoy et al.'s (2002) study of school achievement in mathematics proved a significant positive relationship with collective efficacy, indicating that the greater collective efficacy of a school, the higher degree of achievement. The finding that collective efficacy was more important in explaining school achievement than SES "is of practical significance because it is easier to



change the collective efficacy of a school than it is to influence the SES of the school” (Hoy et al., 2002).

Teacher behaviors that increase student achievement can be positively influenced through collective efficacy (Hoy et al., 2002). Hoy et al. (2002) further explain that collective efficacy has the ability to reduce or strengthen an individual teacher’s efficacy, as an individual teacher may perform differently depending on the level of collective efficacy within the school. Consequently, when this occurs, student achievement is raised (Hoy et al., 2002). Goddard et al.’s (2015) findings suggest that “collective efficacy is a significant positive predictor of differences among schools in student achievement” and “the more robust the sense of collective efficacy...the greater the levels of student achievement.” Hoy et al. (2002) explain the reciprocal relationship of collective efficacy and achievement, stating that “collective efficacy promotes higher school achievement, but higher school achievement also produces greater collective efficacy.” “Collective teacher efficacy, therefore, has the potential to contribute to our understanding of how schools differ in the attainment of their most important objective: the education of students” (Goddard et al., 2000).

### **Summary**

The work of a principal has evolved over the last two decades. The role is now that of an instructional leader focused predominantly on student achievement through the creation of relational and collaborative environments where one can organize, direct, share opportunities and decision-making, and motivate others (McCormick, 2001; Paglis, 2010). The increased accountability measures for student achievement have resulted in the need to understand the ways that collective efficacy can be increased affecting success.

Research in this literature was abundant in defining the ways that collective efficacy can be shaped and increased. Major influences on efficacy were explained through Bandura's (1977, 1986, 1997) social cognitive theory, together with a discussion of the four efficacy building sources of mastery experience, physiological arousal, vicarious experience, and verbal persuasion. These experiences provide a basic foundation for the development of collective efficacy through principal behaviors. An effective principal can create collective efficacy through direct behaviors and practices that attempt to influence the processes of the task-performing group (McCormick, 2001).

An ample amount of research as to why the development of collective efficacy is important and ways to provide the experiences needed to build collective efficacy and its relationship to student achievement was presented in this study. The accountability measures placed on K-12 schools are demanding, and the responsibility for increasing collective efficacy, thus increasing student achievement, falls on the principal. Schools need principals who are prepared to lead effectively, shape and create collective efficacy, and increase student achievement.

## **CHAPTER III**

### **RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY**

#### **Overview**

The purpose of this study was to determine how the principal of an elementary school can influence the collective efficacy of a school and how it relates to student achievement. This qualitative study was informed by capturing collective experiences and perspectives shared by teachers about the development of collective efficacy at their school. I pursued an elementary school in a district in a state in the mid-Atlantic region to determine what principals should be doing to build higher levels of collective efficacy, particularly in lower socioeconomic schools. In this chapter, I describe the techniques to determine the factors that contribute to building collective efficacy. Also included are the research questions, research design, participant selection, data collection process, and a description of the data analysis.

#### **Research Questions**

The literature review presented information on how principals play an important role in the development of collective efficacy within a school. Also, Bandura's (1977, 1982, 1986, 1989, 1993, 1997, 2000) social cognitive theory and its relation to self-efficacy and collective efficacy were explored to learn what must occur for collective efficacy to be heightened, resulting in higher achievement levels. This study focused on determining ways a principal increases collective efficacy and achievement, even with a low socioeconomic barrier. The research design chosen will answer the following two major research questions:

- (1) What experiences/elements were influential in developing the school's collective efficacy?

- (2) How has the self-efficacy of the principal contributed to the school's collective efficacy and influenced achievement?

### **Research Design**

This study was informed by Versland & Erikson's (2017) research; the design and methods will reflect similar measures and actions. An embedded single case-study design was used to identify a school to research (Yin, 2014). "Embedded case studies allow researchers to examine a single organization or program while also investigating several units of analysis at deeper levels within the organization" (Versland & Erikson, 2017. p. 4). This case study investigated the collective efficacy within a school using qualitative approaches. In this study, I used a single PK-5 elementary school as the main case to investigate collective efficacy through the teacher perspective. I utilized qualitative methods through observation, individual interviews, document analysis, and focus groups to analyze the embedded units. These methods will allow for the examination of perspectives of school staff on collective efficacy within the school.

### **Participant Selection Criteria**

Purposeful sampling (Schatzman & Strauss, 1973) was utilized first to identify a district to take part in this research study. This form of sampling was used based on location and availability of potential participants to be contacted in a minimal amount of time according to the aims of the research. The participants were unknown to me; therefore, I used the participating school district central office administrator to assist in contacting the identified school for participation. After the initial participating school was contacted, I asked for help in recruiting teacher participants for individual interviews and one focus group. This technique is called snowball sampling (Goodman, 1961). A total of 11 individual interviews and one focus group

was held. Each participant was an elementary school teacher representing every grade level. All participants were employed within the same school district in a state in the mid-Atlantic region. As the research questions indicated an interest in teachers' perspectives of effective methods employed by principals to increase collective efficacy within a building, elementary school teachers were chosen as the participants.

### **Study participants.**

1. Ethan, Caucasian male, special education teacher
2. Carol, Caucasian female, resource teacher
3. Karen, Caucasian female, kindergarten teacher
4. Chanda, African-American female, reading interventionist
5. Heather, African-American female, second grade teacher
6. Gloria, African-American female, first grade teacher
7. Jody, Caucasian female, third grade teacher
8. Anna, African-American female, fourth grade teacher
9. Brandy, Caucasian female, second grade teacher
10. Kim, Caucasian female, third grade teacher
11. Sarah, African-American female, fifth grade teacher
12. Mrs. Grady, African-American, principal

The participants were assumed to be the most informed regarding the development of collective efficacy within the school, and their perspectives were a vital foundation of the study. In addition, school documents were reviewed to understand the identity and culture of the school. Lastly, the principal of the selected school completed a Principal Self-Efficacy Scale (PSES) [see Appendix A] instrument to further support and provide credibility to the findings of the research.

Specific criteria were used to select the case site. First, the site was a high-poverty school. Second, the case site school met student proficiency state standards for accreditation in English and math. Lastly, a principal of at least three years led the school. The principal in this case study led the school for the past eight years through differing levels of accreditation. In 2014-2015, the school was Accredited with Warning, which was a rating given to a school prior to 2015 when students achieved adjusted pass rates below those required to meet the Fully Accredited rating. The school was Partially Accredited: Warned School-Pass Rate in 2015-2016 which indicates the school was not within a narrow margin of, nor making acceptable progress toward, achieving the adjusted SOL pass rates required for full accreditation. In 2016-2017, the school was a Partially Accredited-Reconstituted School indicating the school failed to meet the requirements for full accreditation for four consecutive years and received permission from the State Board of Education to reconstitute, although it met the accreditation standards in English and math. The next two years, 2017-2018 and 2018-2019, the school was Fully Accredited which is earned by a school when students achieve an adjusted pass rate of 75 percent in English, 70 percent in mathematics, science and history/social science. Parameters of the three criteria are explained in the following paragraphs.

The elementary school site selected served 465 students and was comprised of 81.5% African American, 5.2% Hispanic, 4.1% Caucasian, 8.4% two or more races, 0.4% Asian and 0.4% American-Indian. Students eligible for free and reduced-price lunch represented 89.9% of the student population, and 52.7% of the student population was identified as being economically disadvantaged. The school staff included 22 female teachers representing kindergarten through fifth grade. There were five resource teachers for art, guidance, music, library, and physical education. Five special education teachers, including three males, serviced kindergarten through

fifth grades. There was one specialist and one interventionist for both math and reading and one reading coach on staff as well.

**Measuring and identifying high-poverty/achieving schools.** The first unit of analysis for the case study was to identify schools that were both high-poverty and met student proficiency state standards for accreditation in English and math. Poverty in this case was defined as the inability to meet a minimum level of standards as determined by the government. I used the National School Lunch Program's 2018 Income Eligibility Poverty Guidelines (USDA, 8/30/18) as the measurement guidelines to identify qualifications for free and reduced-price lunch criteria. Sites that had 45% or greater of their student population qualifying for free and reduced-price lunch were identified as a possible case study site. The second criterion for selecting high-poverty/achieving schools was to identify which of the high-poverty schools also met student proficiency state standards in English and math for a minimum of three consecutive years: 2016, 2017, and 2018.

**Measuring efficacious principals.** The second unit of analysis for this case study was measuring a highly efficacious principal. I measured the self-efficacy of the principal at the selected school using a survey about their principal's self-efficacy beliefs to help understand the influence on the collective efficacy in their schools.

***Principal self-efficacy survey instrument.*** To measure the principal's self-efficacy, Tschannen-Moran and Gareis' (2004) PSES was utilized. The PSES is a widely known research tool consisting of an 18-item assessment that requires participants to rate their capabilities on a nine-point Likert-type scale using these descriptors: 1 (not at all), 3 (very little), 5 (to some degree), 7 (quite a bit), 9 (a great deal; Versland & Erikson, 2017). Scores can range 18-162; the higher sense of principal self-efficacy reflects a higher score on the PSES. The PSES asks

principals to assess their capabilities concerning instructional leadership, management, and moral leadership (Tschannen-Moran & Gareis, 2018). Principals who rate every item on the assessment as a 7 (quite a bit) or higher on the nine-point scale were used as criteria for identification of a highly efficacious principal.

### **Procedures to Begin Study**

This study was approved to be exempt to conduct human subjects' research. The process for the selected school district began with an online academic research application for the district. The academic research application attachments included an abstract of the study, the protocols for the interviews, a copy of the instrument used to measure principal self-efficacy, informed consent, and a copy of the exempt approval. Once the necessary paperwork was completed and submitted, an approval was received within 18 days.

Once the school district provided the approval to begin the study, a central office administrator and I discussed the possible sites and a selection was made. An email was sent to the principal of the selected school by the central office administrator, and I was also provided contact information. I emailed the principal of the school site, shared the abstract of my study, and scheduled a date to meet in person to answer any questions. At the meeting, dates were selected to conduct interviews and observations. The principal solicited for willing participants to be interviewed. This solicitation resulted in eight of the 22 total grade level teachers being interviewed; furthermore, I interviewed three teachers including a resource teacher, special education teacher, and a reading interventionist.

### **Data Collection**

The data collection process for this study encompassed interviews and a focus group conducted with teacher participants, in addition to the PSES instrument. The interview process



and focus group allowed for various responses, and follow-up questions derived responses to the open-ended questions that were asked. All participants were asked to sign an informed consent document prior to the beginning of data collection. Participants were provided information on the purpose of the study, risks and benefits, costs and payments, confidentiality, withdrawal privilege, compensation for illness and injury, and voluntary consent.

## **Methods**

### **Document Review and Observation**

I examined several school documents and observed the school setting before completing the interviews and focus group. These documents reviewed included: mission and vision statements, Leadership Team goals, meeting agendas, achievement data, school improvement plan, newsletters, and school climate surveys completed by students and staff. Observations included collaborative team data meetings, grade level meetings, and interactions throughout the day among staff members. Completing the document review and observation allowed for a greater understanding of the school's identity created by its stakeholders.

### **Interviews**

Teachers who agreed to participate at the selected school site were invited to participate in interviews and a focus group. All grade levels, special education, and core subject areas were represented by the study participants. Only teachers' perspectives were used because this study sought to understand the principal's efficacy beliefs and actions through the lens of the teachers, not the principal. Semi-structured interviews were conducted in person with each participant in the school's principal's office. They were scheduled to range from 30 to 45 minutes, but some lasted up to an hour. Participants were asked 11 open-ended questions (see Appendix B) to determine which types of self-efficacy experiences were being provided and whether those

experiences were perceived as building the collective efficacy of the school. General questions about the school's climate, achievements, and frustrations were constructed for the interviews. In addition, specific questions regarding teachers' perceptions of relationships among staff, professional development, program implementation, teacher motivation, and school improvement were constructed (Versland & Erikson, 2017). Participants were reminded that their responses were confidential, their identifying information would be changed, and that they could opt out of the study at any time.

Field notes were taken during the interviews and interviews were audio-recorded using a cell phone and laptop as a backup device. The interview recordings were then uploaded and transcribed using the Temi application and software. After the recordings were transcribed, the researcher reviewed the transcripts for validity and made any adjustments necessary. The researcher made general notes within the document for future analysis. Transcriptions of the interviews were emailed to the respective participants to read and review allowing for any needed corrections. Verification by the interview participant of accuracy of answers and views, coupled with completeness of transcription established credibility (Creswell, 2007).

### **Focus Group Procedures**

Following member checks of interviews, data from the interviews were used to construct questions for the focus group to clarify and deepen the understanding of collective efficacy at the school site. All teachers were invited to attend the focus group and teachers previously interviewed helped to solicit focus group participants. The focus group was held in the school site after school hours in an unused classroom allowing for confidentiality. Eight teachers attended and five were participants previously interviewed. Participants' experience ranged from one year to 31 years. Again, informed consent was obtained from each participant. Next, the

focus group was conducted, and each respondent was identified as a number and responses kept confidential. Participants answered the same four questions (see Appendix C). The focus group was recorded using a cell phone and laptop as a backup device. Participants were instructed to identify themselves with their number prior to responding to the questions. The recording was uploaded and transcribed using the Temi application and software. Notes were taken during the focus group and annotated on the transcription of the focus group recording. Again, the focus group participants were reminded that their responses were confidential. Data were then coded, as detailed in the individual interviews' methods above, for comparison with individual interviews, allowing for any additional understanding of data and/or emergence of themes.

### Data Analysis

Data analysis was used to identify themes resulting from organization and coding practices based on Creswell's data analysis approach (2009).

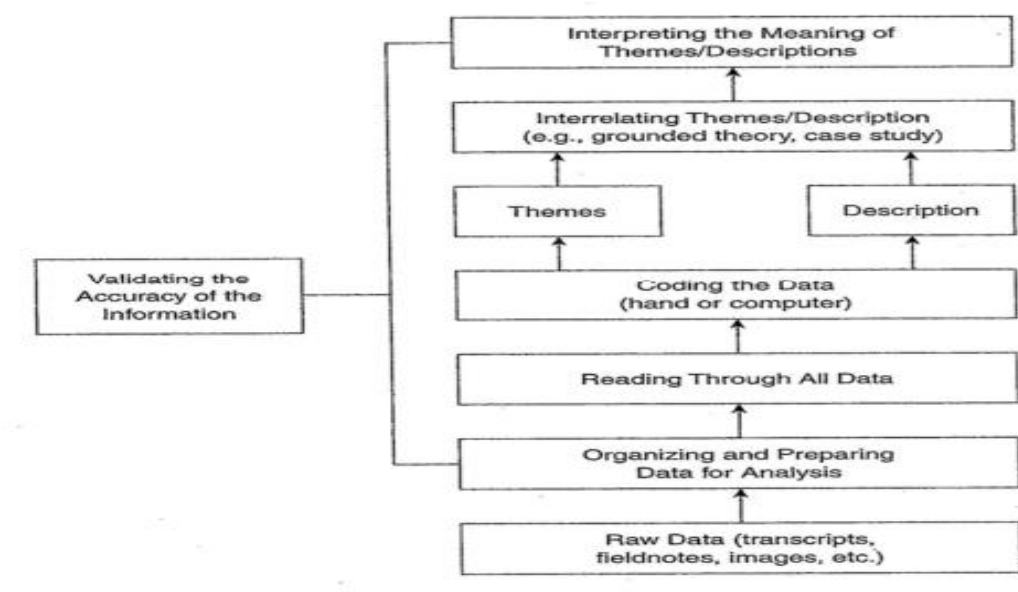


Figure 1.1. Creswell's data analysis in qualitative research. (Creswell, 2009, p. 185)

Coding the data in Creswell's approach (see Figure 1.1) through the initial coding process of comparison for similarities and differences for developing related categories was used to interpret the meaning and themes of the data (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). This data analysis approach was used as each data collection method was completed. Individual interviews and focus group transcripts were initially analyzed using open coding, while document review and the use of the PSES were analyzed using deductive coding to develop categories. Multiple methods of data collection and coding helped ensure credibility of data analysis and establishment of categories ultimately leading to themes. After the first cycle of coding was completed, focus coding (Saldana, 2016), also known as axial coding, was used to further identify more important categories. Saldana (2016) explained that "focus coding searches for the most frequent or significant codes to develop the most salient categories in the data corpus" (p. 239). The use of multiple methods of data collection and analysis allowed for triangulation of data and was an ongoing process.

Data from individual interviews and the focus group were recorded and transcribed within the same day. Member checking of the transcribed interviews was employed before analysis to ensure any errors or misconceptions were corrected. The process of continuously highlighting statements and sentences within the transcript while rereading repeatedly led to the development of clusters of meaning (Creswell, 2007). Coding is the process of breaking data into parts that can be compared for similarities and differences for developing related categories (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). I began my analysis with open coding, allowing for the development of categories, while examining the data for differences and similarities (Saldana, 2016). Next, focused coding was used for more precise data disaggregation. Categories were more concisely organized and theming of data from repetitive codes occurred. Multiple subcategories were also

created during this process. The last coding method employed was axial coding. Relationships between codes and identifying characteristics of the categories were examined to determine what information was most important. Saldana (2016) stated that axial coding is used to identify the relationships between the codes and possibly identify which codes were broken apart during the initial coding phase and strategically put them back together.

Throughout the entire coding process, the researcher identified specific evidence of self-efficacy experiences being provided by the principal. Bandura's (1977) self-efficacy theory was used as a guide during the coding process. Additional codes, not directly connected to the self-efficacy framework, were also identified for the purpose of exploring any additional findings. To organize the data, the researcher developed codebook spreadsheets for easy organization and manipulation of the data.

### **Confidentiality of Participants**

To protect the anonymity of participants, all participants' data, school district, and name of school were assigned pseudonyms and were not used in the reporting process. A key was created and stored on an external drive separate from the pseudonym-identified data. Memos that were created by the researcher did not include any identifying information. The external drive and data were kept in a locked room in the researcher's home office and was password-protected. Backup files were kept in an electronic file on the researcher's home computer, accessible only by a password known to the researcher. All identifying data that can be connected to this study will be maintained for one year after the study and then destroyed.

### **Validity/Role of the Researcher**

The use of multiple data collection methods was employed to include individual interviews and one focus group. After the transcription of interviews, member checking by the

participants was utilized. In addition, a fellow research colleague participating in qualitative research reviewed the data collection, outline of the study, and theoretical approach to confirm the validity of the research. Creswell (1998) suggested that the most important facet of data analysis is to ensure data verification, trustworthiness, and credibility, thereby illustrating the reasoning of the use of multiple data collection methods and participant checking.

I traveled to the participant's school site to allow for ease of participation and limit the impact on instructional time. I treated each person as a professional and was respectful of the time they provided to me to complete the interviews. I also expressed my concern to the principal regarding the desire to minimize the interference on instructional time. Each participant was reassured that their identities and responses would remain confidential, and this assurance was reiterated to the principal.

This study is relevant to me professionally, as I am an aspiring principal and want to continue developing my own skillset to shape the efficacy of my future staff, hopefully resulting in increased student achievement. Currently, I am a classroom teacher, and I have worked under different principals over the years. I have witnessed the difference of collective efficacy within my own school based on the leadership skills of the acting principal. This research provided me with feedback that influenced my interpersonal skills, collaboration, and the building of efficacy of those around me now and those whom I may supervise in the future. I also hope this research will accurately and adequately represent teachers' perspectives of the ways in which the principal's self-efficacy influences and shapes the school's collective efficacy.

### **Summary**

Fourteen teachers made up the participant group from a district in a state in the mid-Atlantic region. Once approval was gained, primary contact was made with one principal to

begin the data collection process. Snowball sampling was used to recruit participants. The principal of the site was contacted by the district's central office administrator via email to gain her consent, and I followed up with email correspondence. Once all interviews and focus groups were conducted, transcription of interviews was completed. To ensure data were ready to be analyzed, participant checking was completed. Participant checking of transcripts and collegial review of the research increased the validity of the research and reduced researcher bias.

## **CHAPTER IV**

### **STUDY FINDINGS**

#### **Overview**

I examined the perceptions of elementary school teachers related to the shaping of collective efficacy within their school. I studied one elementary school in a district in the mid-Atlantic region to examine how the beliefs and actions of a school principal shape collective efficacy that contributes to elevating the school climate in a high-poverty, high-achieving school while providing educational possibilities that improve teaching and learning through the perspective of teachers. I strove to ascertain, through data analysis, the varying levels of principal and collective efficacy in light of participants' feedback. This study involved two research questions: What experiences/elements influence the school's collective efficacy? How has the self-efficacy of the principal contributed to the school's collective efficacy and influenced achievement? In this chapter, I will discuss the findings that emerged from participants' interviews and focus group. A qualitative approach informed by theory was used and two primary themes emerged and are explored in these findings.

#### **Discussion of Findings**

Fourteen elementary school teachers agreed to participate in the study from a single elementary school in one district in a state in the mid-Atlantic region. The participants all worked in the school for five or more years, with the exception of one interview participant who had three years of experience and one focus group participant with one year of experience; all experience was gained from the case study site. All participants have also worked under the principal for the last five years or more, again with the only outlier being the participants with one- and three-years' experience. The intended goal of this study was to examine how the



beliefs and actions of a school principal contributes to the shaping of collective efficacy in a high-poverty school while providing educational possibilities that improve teaching and learning through the perspective of teachers. The context, findings, and discussion of this study are shared by interpreting the discourse of the participants.

Two primary themes emerged after an analysis of the data (1) experiences that contributed to collective efficacy development and (2) principal self-efficacy influenced collective efficacy. Both themes were driven by the theoretical framework, and all of the participants observed one or more of these themes at different levels, which are explored in detail in this chapter. The first theme examines the experiences that contributed to collective efficacy development. Subthemes emerged including relationship-based connections, climate, and shared accountability. The second theme explores how principal self-efficacy beliefs influenced collective efficacy. This theme includes two subthemes: building capacity and leading by example. The PSES completed by the principal resulted in a score of 138 out of a possible 162, indicating the principal believed she was efficacious in the ability to fulfill obligations of her position. These results supported the findings gained from participant responses resulting in the theme principal self-efficacy influenced collective efficacy.

### **Theme 1: Experiences that Contributed to Collective Efficacy Development**

The descriptions shared by participants led to the development of the themes. I asked each participant questions that enabled them to express feelings about the development and escalation of success within their school. The participants shared their perspectives and as I analyzed responses, a pattern began to develop. All 11 interview participants made references to the idea that the principal and team members support them professionally, which lends itself to success. They told stories illustrating their responses and three subthemes developed:

relationship-based connections, climate, and shared accountability. Their anecdotes delineated specific evidence of collective efficacy.

The participants were very cheerful and sometimes exuberant when sharing stories or perspectives, thus portraying credibility to experiences that contributed to collective efficacy development. Throughout the interview process, as participants shared perspectives eventually developing into this theme, the climate of the interviews was light and open. All participants were comfortable and relaxed, and many were excited to partake in a study regarding academic improvement of their school.

**Relationship-based connections.** The data revealed relationship-based connections were a positive perspective shared by all participants. Through individual interviews, participants expounded on the concept that this subtheme led them to be successful. Participants verbalized connections to other staff members and administration; however, one participant shared her belief that expectations of staff members could sometimes be compromised by relationships between staff and principal. I further analyzed the relationship aspects shared by participants. The analysis involved grouping similar descriptions to show how participants viewed relationships with their community, parents, students, colleagues, and principal and the perceived impact on success. Only one participant shared her experiences regarding lack of support from other teachers. It was evident to me that connections with teachers and the principal set the path for success in the building.

The relationship-based connection was the most consistent subtheme that emerged based on interviews and the focus group. When participants were asked about staff morale and presented what relationships at their school look like, responses varied. The collected data revealed relationships with multiple stakeholders including students, teachers, administration,

and community partners all play a significant role in school success.

The shared perspectives and experiences illustrated the power of relationships within the school, inspired by behaviors of the principal. Anna shared, “the relationships we build with the kids and their parents and their families, if anybody would ask me about the success of our building, I would definitely say it was that.” This perspective was reinforced when Brandy stated, “one of the things I like about this school is because the relationships are there, and the kids know it's genuine and the parents know, too.” Jody shared the following which reflected a type of relationship building communication which Mrs. Grady expects between the teacher and parents,

She's always big on, make sure you're talking to the parents, make sure you're having those conversations. Have you talked to the parents and things like that because they need to know, and they need to be able to support? If they don't know, they can't support you.

When asked about what the participants perceived to attribute to their success, Sarah replied,

It's the rapport, if you can, because we have that connection with the kids and because so many of the teachers have that connection with so many of the other kids in the building, not even just your class, you have that connection with some of the other kids.

Relationships with community partners have an impact on school success in multiple ways. Examples of how this occurred included providing supplies for the students, fund-raising opportunities, and volunteering to come to the school regularly and read with students who are struggling readers and who could also use a positive influence from a mentor other than a staff member. The participants validated the role of community partners in school success, and Brandy illustrated this relationship with the following perspective,

[Mrs. Grady] has good relationships with, we have good relationships with people in the community. We have some community-based partners that are helpful, and we have volunteers that come in and stuff and I just think that's a big piece because of our school. It's been here forever so, you have the Greenwood Gardens, that's there. They're older people who have lived in the community, so they're vested, which I mean they say it takes a village. I mean it really does and we're very lucky because we do have a lot of community partners that helped, too.

Relationship-based connections created in the building are reciprocal and replicated between staff and principal. The principal invested herself in getting to know her staff and truly cares about each individual. As the principal created and sustained these personal relationships with each staff member, teachers have become invested in the success of the principal's goals. All participants expressed that because of the relationship they have with the administrator, they can openly speak to her regarding professional or personal failures and successes. Staff members also replicated these same types of relationships with their colleagues. Anna provided a response to support the creation of these relationships by sharing,

I think I've kind of seen the, you know, think this is my twelfth year here maybe, but I definitely think the relationships that we both, that she builds with us and also think the relationships that we're trying and working hard to build with each other leads to success. Anna continued to exemplify the true reciprocal nature of the relationships at the school by stating,

I think the conversations, the other activities that we do, coming around in the mornings and greeting people, knowing one thing about a person and just asking them and expanding on that. Speaking to your kids helps to build a relationship and her door's

always open. Like even when you know that she doesn't want to be bothered, I mean honestly, we all get there, but just having the open-door policy that hey, you can stop by, you can talk to me, you can text me because I know all the extra stuff. I've kind of been around a little bit so I know the extra stuff she does. Just the care for people. I mean she called me the day before Thanksgiving. She was like we got a family that needs some stuff. Okay, I'm on it, you know, she was on it already. So those types of things maybe go unnoticed, but honestly in times like these, you think about stuff like that and you know how far a person's, what they do.

Lastly, participants shared that the principal is able to adapt her leadership practices with individuals based on relationships created with each individual and her ability to perceive their needs to be successful without diminishing their feelings of competence. Flexibility in leadership practices allowing for adaptation based on the needs of individuals and the organization as a whole were reflected in what I witnessed through observations and through interview responses. Brandy shared,

With her leadership style, it, it's not one specific leadership style. I think it depends on the individual. Like if you need to be micromanaged and I mean she could do it, but if you are doing, you know what you're doing or if you need help, she's there, you know, it just, I think it just depends on the person. So, she has a lot of different leadership styles, which is kind of nice. If you know what you're doing and you don't need a whole lot of guidance, then you know, she kind of leaves you to be the professional that you went to school to be and if you are struggling or you need help, she'll just get you the resources you need, if she needs to get people from downtown to come in and help, like specialists and stuff and you know, and it's not a bad thing obviously, but you know, just to make

sure everybody's like, you know, maintaining and getting what they need.

All participants stated they felt comfortable approaching the principal, whether it was personal or professional in nature. Gloria shared her perspective on the relationship by stating, “it's an open relationship. I think the administrator is approachable. I think you can have conversations with her, regardless of the nature, whether you agree or disagree, and she's open to listening to her staff.” Those that had worked at the same school under a different principal stated the previous climate did not support the building of a collaborative or social environment and the current types of relationships were not present. A strong sense of security and well-being appears to have been developed through these relationships allowing for the creation of the feeling of competence and capacity building within the school.

**Climate.** After the analysis of data from the interviews, focus group, and development of the first subtheme, the second subtheme emerged. The analysis revealed a connection to physiological state and its part in the experiences of the organization. In this section, the subtheme of climate will be examined through the words of the participants and the applicable connections. The climate of an environment can affect teacher perceptions, the feelings one has, and how they react to situations, impacting collective efficacy.

People have different views of what they expect from their employer, and teachers are no different. Personal views and employer actions can increase or decrease motivation having an overall influence on climate. The principal at this case site created experiences to allow for both successes and failures to be seen through an optimistic lens. The building of professionalism, respect, and differing motivational strategies employed by the principal has made a difference in how participants feel about their workplace, job, and themselves. Brandy shared, “I think everybody gets along great. I think there's that professional relationship and there's that mutual

respect. We're professionals and we're treated like professionals.” Anna further supported the creation of positive motivational factors by sharing,

[We have] jeans on Friday, but I mean, even though that's just a little thing, like someone says, like sometimes as a teacher you feel like you don't have a lot of control over stuff. So, I think that, I think sometimes in staff meetings when she asks and says, Hey, what would you guys like, you know, because, um, we had a conversation how we don't always want food, but food is cheap and easy and making us feel appreciated. I think not just during teacher appreciation week but even like throughout the year making them feel appreciated and I think that's really, really important.

The recognition the principal has to solicit ideas of what staff members would like to make them feel appreciated illustrates the understanding she has of the influence physiological state has on school climate. Kim also shared,

You know, sometimes they'll bring in like different breakfasts in the morning. Our PBIS team this year is doing like breakfast on a cart, so you can sign up and they'll bring you breakfast one day a month. So that's kind of a, you know, teachers are food motivated. We're like the kids. Yeah. Sometimes it's packs of paper, so if she wants something turned in for the PTA the first team that pays their dues for PTA gets a box paper. So that's a big thing because we only get one ream of paper a month. So, we're like, yes, paper, give em' the money.

The majority of participants shared that the principal will make a conscious effort to help teachers with increased daily workload. While the principal stood by doing what was necessary to ensure sure students are successful, she also understood how high demands are on teachers. Observations supported the participant responses pertaining to understanding the daily demands

on classroom teachers. The principal not only provided ideas of how she could support the staff with the workload but also solicited advice from teachers. The instruction and fidelity of new initiative implementation occurring at the school is not to be compromised, which was exhibited through observations, document review, interviews, and focus group responses, but the principal was also aware of the unbalanced demands on classroom teachers and wanted to be a source of guidance, assistance and solution. Multiple interview responses provided scenarios as to how teacher frustrations with implementation of new initiatives are addressed by the principal, and the following example by Anna illustrated the majority of their responses,

Her reaction would be, first of all, how's it going to benefit the kids? Honestly, she's going to say is it going to benefit the kids because if it is then we need to do and, and how can we, what can, she's good for saying, what can I do to just lessen your load a little bit? She's come into my room in the past and taken a group of kids. I'm like, I can't do dah, da, dah. She's like, okay, I'll commit to Tuesday and Thursday, you know, I'll commit to what I can. I'll come. You have four kids ready for me, how, I will be there, and I will do it and honestly if she can be there and do it, she will. I mean she gets pulled in a lot of directions too, but if she can be there and, and do it, she will be there and do it.

Lastly, visibility and the positive energy the principal displayed daily was another common response among participants related to the school's climate. I witnessed the principal and assistant principal greeting students upon arrival and during dismissal at both entrances and exits of the school building. They greeted the students with enthusiasm, provided compliments, asked personal questions reflecting the relationships that have been created, and gave and received hugs. Every morning I observed the principal walking the hallway and making positive contact at the beginning of the instructional day by entering the classroom or waving through the



classroom door window. The smiles and interactions between the principal and both teachers and students illustrated the high levels of visibility and positive energy the principal displays, which in turn influence the school's climate. Heather's response supported the observations and responses shared by stating,

She's got as much energy as these second graders, she does. Every principal, administrator, it's not like that. Yeah, because even in the morning, like when the kids are coming in, Mrs. Grady at the door where the buses come and then she's posted right out here in the main hall where they go to the cafeteria. So, they see her like every morning and they know she's here. So, you know, I mean, it makes a huge difference.

**Shared accountability.** A third subtheme, shared accountability, emerged revealing a connection to feelings of success. The analysis revealed a connection to shared responsibility and its part in the experiences of the organization. In this section, the subtheme of shared accountability was examined through the words of the participants and applicable connections.

Success can be created through the collaboration of all members as it allows for the opportunity of growth within an organization. At this case site, teachers were willing to collaborate, and it not only resulted in relationship building, but it also developed into shared accountability. The participants all believed they were responsible for the success of all students within the building, and they addressed it that way. In grade level meetings, students were addressed as "our children" and not "my children." Not only were classroom teachers responsible for instructional success, but so was the entire instructional staff. Carol stated, "it's like we're all in this together, kinda like a bunch of parents and a whole lot of children. I think we got a bunch of dedicated people who try, just really knock themselves out." Ethan also illustrated how shared accountability occurs within the school stating,

So, everything's shared and everyone is participating. Even the resource team, I know sometimes like steps in or the PE teacher coming in to ask how she can help with reading or how she can help with math, music teacher as well. So, a lot of time I'm working, focused on something in reading, the librarian will touch on that if I talk to her about it. Yeah, just a lot of working together.

The shared accountability goes beyond just general instruction as well. The teachers here continued the relationships previously created with their students and follow them. In doing so, they build up relationships with their colleagues as they try to support them in the endeavor of ongoing relationship building and student success. Primary teachers supported intermediate testing grades by providing incentives to the students who meet the goals set by the current classroom teacher. These actions continued to maintain a relationship with students while also building a supportive relationship by helping to reach the goals of intermediate grade teachers. Heather shared an example of this,

[The students] know you care even when you leave them. So, some of the other teachers tried to start that and say, hey, will you help me out a little bit? Or I'll go across the hall because the second and fourth is on the same hall. I was like y'all getting ready to take your CSA's? Everybody who gets, the teacher put the rate at 75, I get you pizza. Let them know it is so important, it's so important. Ms. Brown is going to buy something, and Mr. Ethan is going to let you eat lunch with him because I don't have that many guys, or whatever it takes for them to know how important it is and that we're supporting them in passing and a lot of teachers weren't aware of that. I mean some people could go, if you're not third, fourth or fifth, we forget that y'all have testing. I don't because I've been in third, that you're testing and it's important and we want to support you guys, so we'll

say, hey, you got kids, I do. I have a classroom always full with everybody's kids.

Anybody else? If there's something you need to do, send me such and such so you can do it. I'm trying to make it easier for you and if the next teacher does that and the next teacher and the next teacher sees you doing, then you got a whole building of everybody supporting each other in the way that they want.

What emerged as a finding here from the perspectives of the participants was the shared feeling of accountability for success of all students and teachers. The interviews revealed the responsibility participants felt towards creating success for every student and teacher within the school. None of the participant responses revealed any negative perceptions of this philosophy. In addition, observations during grade level data meetings reflected the shared accountability perspective as teachers collaborated with a focus on all students who were not meeting grade expectations or mastering skills. They shared successful instructional strategies, volunteered to swap students to provide small group instruction and remediation, as well as other measures to promote the success of all the students within the grade level.

## **Theme 2: Principal Self-Efficacy Influenced Collective Efficacy**

The second theme formed from participant perspectives shared regarding the ways in which challenges and new initiatives are received and processed within the school setting. It is applicable to research on how self-efficacy beliefs of a principal influence collective efficacy. The PSES was specifically used as the foundation for analysis of principal self-efficacy beliefs at the case site. The PSES completed by Mrs. Grady indicated that she felt she was able to influence the school quite a bit to a great deal, which were scaled responses of seven through nine with nine being the highest available response option. The instructional focus of the school was already mandated through district-wide initiatives due to the number of schools previously

lacking state accreditation. This theme specifically examined school improvement initiatives being sent down from the district level. The development of two subthemes occurred; building capacity and leading by example. The principal demonstrated a fidelity to initiative implementation which was evident not just in grade level meetings, but also through review of leadership team goals, meeting agendas, and the school improvement plan.

**Building capacity.** Participants credited the principal with the ability to create a collaborative environment and build relationships resulting in their ability to attain and maintain accreditation. The creation of collaborative environments and relationship building occurring results in the building of capacity within the school. The principal establishes expectations, monitors instruction through walk-throughs and observations, provides feedback, and offers encouragement and support. Successes are celebrated through “shout outs” in staff newsletters and in meetings. Participants acknowledged this was a source of their feelings of success, not just individually, but also as a school. The majority of participants shared that actions of the principal influence their perceptions of changes or failures because they celebrate little things even when they do not meet the ultimate goal.

It was expressed multiple times that the principal understood the strengths of her staff members and was able to use that to meet collaborative goals of the school. A principal who understands the strengths and weaknesses of their school can help to build capacity. Successful building of capacity allows for the potential of greater success in implementation of new initiatives and changes. The ability to place the right teachers in roles where their strengths can be utilized to their full potential provides a strong foundation for success of the school. Gloria shares an insight into how this has occurred,

She tends to lead people where it fits, so if that makes sense. I'm trying to think how to,

how to describe her leadership because she's not uh, and this is, of course from my perspective, somebody might be different. She's not really a pushy leader. She's a leader who wants, she wants information. I'm like, I want to know from your perspective because we're all in this together helping move this school forward. What is going to help us get there? And then um, you know, she, she even lets you sign up for you, okay, you want to work with fifth grade during your resource time so many days a week? Taking that expertise from a lower grade up to a higher grade because we know the foundational skills. I think that sort of help some kids and just utilizing every resource to its, she's a person who seems to utilize every single resource person based on their expertise, you know, there is no compromising. It's this is what I need you to do. Okay. So, let's get to it.

Karen further illustrates how success is increased through capacity building sharing,

Having the right support staff, those that are knowledgeable in the right place that are willing to take that extra step. I mean we've had the afterschool tutoring program that helps and it's really focusing on those kids that need that support . . . and making sure those kids that are gifted are getting identified because sometimes those are the behavior needs and getting them identified, now they're getting the things they need to be challenged.

The willingness of the principal to request and expect collaborative solutions to problems within the school illustrated the understanding she has of shared leadership and decision-making. She recognized that the teachers are the experts in instruction and involved them in the processes resulting in increased capacity. Gloria's response shared evidence of this,

I knew that Mrs. Grady sort of brought people together and because I remember this, I

was in one of those meetings, specific people, just to brainstorm what is our strategy going to be, how are we going to keep folks moving forward? What do we need to do for fifth grade because they are lagging in this area? What do we need to do for, you know, she, what do, so she wanted the collective thinking of some folks and she expected answers. She wanted answers and see this is a good thing. I don't know which question was up there. She's not an administrator who works in isolation. She sort of wants to hear from these people who she's hired or who had been placed here as the experts and her classroom teachers who are the experts in that room. So, I think she sort of strategizes and you know, and people got to work. We also had a lot of support from the division. It was almost like a gradual release, you know, it was here and then as things got better we were sort of released, you know?

All interview responses regarding communicating changes and implementation of new initiatives reflected a common narrative. The principal is dedicated to the fidelity of instructional practices and new initiatives, but she also recognizes that they may not always be a best fit with their specific school. She understood that one more thing may be the breaking point for staff members but tried to convey information, so teachers received the information in the least threatening manner to the emotional state of the individual and school. Communicating challenges and new initiative implementations while supporting them simultaneously was shared by Brandy,

She just tries to introduce it as a way like, yeah, you know, because she gets it. I mean she's been in the classroom and she's like I know it's one more thing but know we got to do it. I mean she just kind of softens the blow I guess for lack of a better way of saying it but I mean when we do what we're supposed to do and that's where that other part comes

back with that communication is at work and not working because that way she can tell, I said I hate to say the powers that be, but whoever is wanting us to implement whatever, she can let them know to give them feedback too. I mean she'll look at us and she's like, I know it's just one more thing on your plate, but just try to push through kind of like pep us up or whatever but we still know we have to do it, but I mean she gets it. In which, I mean, I think it does help.

Sarah also shared an example illustrating how the principal still continues to try to build capacity even when communicating with teachers who are not following through with the expectations set for changes and implementations,

She works with you. If it's something that she needs to get off her chest and it's something that we just have to do, she'll say it in a respectful manner so that it won't be any, a disconnect between the administration and the teachers. She'll say like, we have to do this. It should, she won't just put it all on us. She'll say we, like we're a team. So, I think it's great because she's actually a really good principal that I'm glad I am here with her.

In addition to support during implementation there was follow-through with feedback. Positive feedback creates a feeling of competency after new initiatives are implemented. Even when goals are not met, feedback can still be positive, as it works to lead the individual or organization on the right path to change. The feedback occurring during and after implementation and changes not only builds efficacy but simultaneously builds capacity.

Chanda illustrated how the principal does this by sharing,

She sets a goal for us. This is what she would like. This is our end game, our end goal so far as percentages and um, you know, how much growth students should be making.

Um, meeting with us regularly and then providing the feedback, observations and feedback. Lots of feedback. Lots of feedback.

**Leading by example.** Leading by example was identified in the data as a consequential way collective efficacy was influenced. Collective efficacy development is directly related to principal self-efficacy as an individual's actions reflect their beliefs. The actions of the principal exemplified she is a team player and will not expect anything of her staff that she would not do or expect of herself. She did not work in isolation and modeled what relationships, communication, and collaboration looks like, and it is reflected among her staff as evident through interview responses and observations. Anna provided an example of how Mrs. Grady is a part of the school and not just a leader of the school when she shared, "for Thanksgiving lunch she was behind there serving the families, she wouldn't ask us to do something that she's not going to do."

The influence of modeling by the principal is reflected in teacher interactions and exemplified by Kim's response,

I think that has really helped my perspective of teaching because I'm like, it's not a lone wolf trying to do it, like you have to rely on other people and I mean they, they model that, you know, they rely on us, they rely on each other. So it's just been a really good example to see and I mean my teammates were really good coming in, like I was brand new, so it was like I have no idea what I'm doing and they're just like, okay, this is how we do it, you know, like we're willing to help you, we'll spend time, all these things. So, it's just nice to see the up in the communication between the heads of the school.

The perspectives of interview participants consistently reflected the influence principal modeling has on relationships. Anna stated,



Overall, I would say we have a pretty good working relationship with people that I think it comes from the top down. So, I think we've had to have a lot of modeling and a lot of conversations to have a good working relationship.

Chanda's response further emphasized the influence of principal modeling by sharing,

They model being a team player and building relationships with students and staff.

They're awesome. No really. No. Mrs. Grady is awesome. She, she truly models what she expects to see from her teachers. So, um, how we interact with each other. She sets the tone for the building.

### **Focus Group Findings**

#### **Mastery Experiences**

The focus group provided a deeper understanding of the influence of the principal on their mastery of instruction. The data analysis from interviews resulted in a lack of mastery experiences. Trainings and professional development were offered, but most times required, and teachers were expected to return to the classroom and implement as appropriate. There was no indication of follow-up to observe the implementation of the specific strategies obtained through trainings and professional development to build efficacy through mastery experiences. Due to this finding a question, directly related to describing mastery experiences and feedback was developed for the focus group.

The conversation within the focus group revealed feedback from the principal does not impact their feelings of efficacy in regard to instruction. The participants provided information through conversation, in which they all agreed, that the principal did not influence their feelings of competency in instruction. One participant shared the following, which reflected the responses of the entire focus group,

I don't think she influences my competency. I think the influence comes from the coursework I'm taking or information that the division workshops that sort of focus on what I should be doing in class. I think what she might do to influence me is making observations and comments that sort of confirm what I've learned in class, but I really don't see her as influencing my competency. It is more of confirming my learning.

Another focus group participant followed up by stating, "It's more of an encouragement. If you're way up here already, she encourages you to keep going. If you're down here, she encourages you with other ways to fix it, strategies and such." The focus group participants did recognize that influence by the principal on novice teachers looked slightly different and shared the following,

And just from conversations with new teachers, I think she has been an influencer there because they don't have probably the base of knowledge that we have, and she has had to influence them to be appropriate with their instruction, timely with their instruction, and her influences have probably come in the form of documentation and conversations. So, I think she has influenced certain new teachers in the building to do better for the purpose of ensuring success and so that the others on the grade level are not carrying the weight.

Evidence from the focus group suggests that feedback may influence the consistency in instructional expectations and provide opportunities for encouragement and confirmation, but the impact on collective efficacy was not established.

### **Shared Mission and Vision**

The focus group not only provided a deeper understanding of the influence of mastery experiences but also the construct of the school's shared vision or mission. The PSES indicated the principal believed that she had quite a bit of influence, score of 7 out of 9, to generate

enthusiasm for the shared vision of the school; I did not obtain data that reflected this was occurring within the school. After analysis of the documents, data, and interviews, I noticed a discrepancy in the understanding of the school's mission or vision compared to the goal of the school. I had previously reviewed the school's mission and vision statement, which was listed as one and the same, "mission/vision statement." The mission/vision statement states, "Greenwood pride.... where we know them, show them, and grow them to be the best." A strategic mission and vision statement were absent. A question for the focus group was developed to explore the mission and vision, also referred to as the "big picture," of the school.

The focus group revealed that they all believed the mission was accreditation, stating that was the goal of the school and what is verbally expressed to them daily. I continued this conversation by asking them to describe what has been shared by the principal in order for them to see or understand the big picture of what they want every student and their school to accomplish. Not one participant was able to convey the mission or vision or even what they thought it was, other than accreditation. I started to read the mission/vision statement that I had been provided by the principal and two out of eight focus group members began to recite it. I shared that what they just heard or said was their vision/mission statement. One participant stated,

I've always felt like that is a motto, that's our motto, but I've never heard what our vision is. I've always thought, oh, that's our motto, so I'm not sure what the big picture is that drives that, I don't know.

The response of that particular participant reflected the response of all focus group participants. While there seemed to be a shared understanding that the goal of the school is to

continue to remain accredited, there was a lack of understanding of the mission or vision of the school in its entirety and what they should look like.

### **Summary**

The purpose of this study was to investigate and provide new information centered on how the beliefs and actions of a school principal contributes to the shaping of collective efficacy in a high-poverty school while providing educational possibilities that improve teaching and learning through the perspective of teachers. The focus was specifically to explore how self-efficacy of a principal influenced collective efficacy within their school through experiences provided and their own self-efficacy beliefs. This chapter presented findings of 14 elementary teachers from one district about their perceptions of self-efficacy experiences received over the last three or more years. The 11 interviews and one focus group conducted led to a thorough analysis of data. Each interview was transcribed and examined separately to reduce and eliminate biases while coding continued.

Experiences that contributed to collective efficacy development was the most prominent theme that emerged and included three subthemes: relationship-based connections, climate, and shared accountability. The principal provided experiences to build relationships and a collaborative environment that supported the creation and strengthening of relationships. Relationship-based connections created in the building are reciprocal and replicated between staff and principal. Responses revealed that the power of relationships among all stakeholders played an integral role in the success of the school.

Data analysis also revealed a connection to physiological state and its part in the shaping of school climate. The principal created experiences to allow building of professionalism and respect; motivational strategies employed by the principal has made a difference in how

participants feel about their workplace, job, and themselves. Appreciation of staff through multiple means was expressed by all participants. Observations and interview responses reflected visibility and positive energy displayed by the principal influence the school's climate.

Lastly, participant interview responses illustrated success of all students and teachers through shared accountability. Collaboration and relationship building have developed into shared accountability within the school. Observations and participant interview responses reflected the belief that success of all students within the building is the responsibility of the entire staff.

The second theme, principal self-efficacy influenced collective efficacy, yielded two subthemes to include building capacity and leading by example. The principal created a collaborative environment and built relationships that resulted in building capacity. She involved staff in decision-making and practiced shared leadership. In addition, she recognized the demands on her staff and created an environment where new initiatives and changes were implemented in an approach respectful of their physiological state. The understanding of staff members' strengths and strategic placement to use strengths to meet collaborative goals of the school was also an ability demonstrated by the principal. This ability resulted in building of capacity and provided a strong foundation for success of the school.

Leading by example was identified in the data as a way collective efficacy was influenced. The principal had the same expectations for her staff that she has of herself. She was a team player and did not work in isolation. The modeling of what relationships, communication, and collaboration looks like was evident through observations and participant interview responses.

Inconsistencies in understanding the school's mission or vision and the lack of mastery

experiences and its impact on efficacy was revealed from data through interview and focus group responses. The school's mission/vision was convoluted and thought of as a motto. Participants were under the impression that the mission/vision of the school was to maintain accreditation. In addition, there was a lack of mastery experiences. Focus group participants shared that even when feedback is received, it does not impact their feelings of instructional efficacy but confirmed their own learning and ability or was seen as a form of encouragement. This finding reflected a relationship with physiological state versus mastery experiences.

The data suggest that the principal provided three of the four sources of self-efficacy through experiences. Self-efficacy beliefs of the principal also influenced collective efficacy in the area of capacity and leading by example. The data from the document review, interviews, and focus group revealed inconsistencies and a lack of one self-efficacy source that the principal should explore. Additional suggestions and implications will be discussed in more detail in Chapter V. In addition, summary statements of each research question, findings, conclusions, and recommendations for practice and future research will be discussed.

## **CHAPTER V**

### **DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS AND IMPLICATIONS**

#### **Overview**

In this study I examined the development of collective efficacy of elementary school teachers. The focus was specifically to explore ways principal self-efficacy influenced the collective efficacy of their school through the perspectives of teachers. Two central questions guided this study: What experiences/elements were influential in developing the school's collective efficacy? How has the self-efficacy of the principal contributed to the school's collective efficacy and influenced achievement? The literature studied supported the tenets of self-efficacy theory. Through a general qualitative approach, interviews and a focus group were conducted to gather, analyze, and interpret data to present perspectives of teachers based on their experiences. I will summarize the findings and discuss implications for further research and practice in this chapter.

#### **Summary of Methodology**

I employed qualitative methods for this study in the form of participant interviews and facilitation of a focus group. Through triangulation of those techniques, I collected and analyzed the resulting data. Eleven elementary school teachers from one district in a state in the mid-Atlantic region made up the convenience sample for the interview portion of this study. The participants included one male and 10 female elementary teachers with a range of three to 31 years of experience. The focus group was made up of eight teachers with a range of one to 31 years of experience.

In order to ensure accuracy of the data, member checking of transcripts was employed by participants before analysis began. Preliminary codes were established after examination of each

transcript to determine if any patterns existed. The data were transferred to Excel to create spreadsheets for organizational purposes and allowed manipulation of the data. Upon determination of patterns, data were then labeled, and subcategories were created. An examination of the data to identify relationships was then completed. Themes and subthemes were developed, and findings were revealed. A peer researcher was used to read, review, and ask questions about themes that developed and were subsequently presented in this study.

### **Summary of Findings**

Accountability standards for student achievement have risen over the last two decades and school accreditation reflects the ability of a school to meet the minimum standards of student proficiency deemed necessary to ensure an adequate education. An obstacle to meeting accreditation is low SES of the school's population. Schools with low SES generally have low collective efficacy because students from low SES backgrounds tend to have greater difficulties that begin outside of school, and teachers do not always believe that they can overcome those needs (Hoy et al., 2002). Bandura's (1993) research challenged that mindset, as findings on collective efficacy and student achievement support the construct of collective efficacy relating to student achievement and collective efficacy having a greater effect on achievement than SES. A way a school with low SES can be successful, overcome barriers to achievement, and improve student learning is through a principal focused on building collective efficacy (Fancera & Bliss, 2011).

The findings and conclusions resulting from the research of principal influence on collective efficacy will be presented in this chapter. Two distinct themes were revealed through document review, interviews, a focus group, and the PSES. These themes included experiences that contributed to collective efficacy development and principal self-efficacy influenced



collective efficacy. Within each theme, subthemes emerged and the supporting data under each theme was organized to identify ways the principal influenced collective efficacy through experiences and self-efficacy beliefs. The study concludes with seven findings, five of which illuminated ways the principal was strategic in raising collective efficacy. Two additional findings highlighted the areas for potential growth to become more strategic in the building of collective efficacy and as an area for future research. The chapter is organized into four sections including: findings organized by theme and connection to literature, implications for practice, implications for future research, and the conclusion relevant to the presented research questions.

### **Experiences that Contributed to Collective Efficacy**

The first theme, experiences that contributed to collective efficacy, as reported in Chapter IV, was revealed first through data analysis and then supported by literature. Upon further analysis subthemes emerged: relationship-based connections, climate, and shared accountability. The subthemes explain the extent experiences provided by the principal increased collective efficacy within the school.

#### **Finding 1: Verbal Persuasion and Vicarious Learning Through Relationship Building**

This finding was revealed through interview data and observations. Evidence throughout the data concluded that self-efficacy sources of verbal persuasion and vicarious learning through relationship building occurred through experiences provided within the school. The interviews revealed their perceptions that relationships with community, parents, students, colleagues, and administration were a prominent reason for success at their school.

This finding had a strong connection to social cognitive theory; specifically cited were sources of verbal persuasion and vicarious learning. As evidenced in the literature, it is important to provide verbal persuasion and vicarious learning experiences to build efficacy.

Vicarious learning, which Bandura (1977) regards as the second efficacy source, is also described as learning from modeling. The relationship building that occurred at the case site helped develop collaborative environments built on trust. Teachers do not rely solely on direct experiences; they listen to stories about achievements and successes of their colleagues to inform collective efficacy (Goddard et al., 2000). When this occurred, teachers provided support to colleagues as they shared or modeled instructional strategies to build efficacy of those around them. Just as students observe teachers as models, individuals can discern the skills and behaviors necessary for mastery by observing successful models similar to the observer (Schunk, 2016). The school practiced differentiating instructional practices modeled through collaboration among all teachers. This aligned with research by Goddard et al. (2004) stating differentiating instructional practices to reach all students, a goal in collaborative teaching practices resulting in high levels of collective efficacy, can also reduce the effects of poverty.

This finding further related to the role of the principal providing verbal persuasion and vicarious learning experiences through relationships. Bandura (1997) describes verbal persuasion as one's abilities or capacity, which is often provided through evaluative feedback, that can help develop skills or attributes, particularly in the early stages of skill development. Participants shared examples of ways the principal continually provided feedback to teachers and helped to bolster their feelings of success, even when target goals may have not been met. They also expressed ways non-threatening relationships have been formed between the principal and each individual staff member that enabled the reception of constructive feedback in a positive manner and the use of feedback to build efficacy. The findings indicated verbal persuasion and vicarious learning experiences were provided by the principal and promoted collective efficacy development within the school. This aligned with literature presented in Chapter II and

examples provided by participants additionally supported research by Goddard et al. (2000) stating verbal persuasion is not likely to be a powerful change agent, but it can influence collective efficacy of a faculty when coupled with models of success and positive direct experiences.

### **Finding 2: Verbal Persuasion and Building Capacity**

This finding was also revealed through interview data and observations. Evidence throughout the data concluded the self-efficacy source of verbal persuasion through building capacity occurred through experiences provided within the school. This finding aligned with the literature presented in Chapter II. Verbal persuasion, the third efficacy source, of Bandura's (1977) social cognitive theory, plays a role in building capacity. When one struggles, failure can be a feeling that an individual internalizes, but in a collaborative environment, verbal persuasion allows for expression of capability from those around you. Verbal persuasion occurred at the school through the creation of a collaborative environment and relationship building which participants credited to increased academic success.

The participants shared examples illustrating the role the principal played in establishing expectations, monitoring, providing feedback, as well as professional and personal encouragement and support. These were all modes to build capacity through the source of verbal persuasion and are supported through research literature. Wahlstrom et al. (2010) found that effective leadership depends on expectations, efficacy, and engagement, and the three concepts do not denote isolated dimensions of leadership but rather imply complementary relationships that sustain effective leadership at all levels. Successful building of capacity allows for the potential of greater success in implementation of new initiatives and changes; verbal persuasion as an efficacy source is an easy way to build capacity. Participants described verbal persuasion

as a source of their feelings of success, not just individually but also as a school, which validated the presence of verbal persuasion in building capacity.

### **Finding 3: Vicarious Learning and Principal Modeling**

This finding was revealed through interview data and observations. Evidence throughout the data concluded the self-efficacy source of vicarious learning through principal modeling occurred through experiences provided within the school. This finding reflected social cognitive theory and the efficacy source of vicarious learning or modeling. Schunk's (2016) research illustrated this theme through literature stating learning occurs vicariously through observation of models. Individual teacher efficacy can be effectively created through vicarious experiences and modeling, but these strategies also promote collective teacher efficacy (Goddard et al., 2000). The data analysis identified leading by example as a way collective efficacy was influenced within the school. Participants shared stories that reflected actions of the principal validating her ability to model what she expected of her staff and observations supported the responses. All participants revealed that her nature was not to work in isolation, and she modeled to an extent what relationships, communication, and collaboration should look like within the school. This finding indicated the principal provided vicarious learning experiences and modeled expectations resulting in the raising of collective efficacy.

### **Finding 4: Physiological State, School Climate and Shared Accountability**

This finding was revealed through interview data and observations. Evidence throughout the data concluded the self-efficacy source of physiological state was affected by the nature of the school's climate and shared accountability occurred through experiences provided within the school. Literature in Chapter II on the efficacy source of physiological state aligned with perspectives shared by interview participants and observations made in the school.

Experiences to build collective efficacy through the creation of a positive physiological state of the organization results in the ability to heighten collective efficacy. Bandura (1989) states emotional state alone does not determine self-efficacy; rather, how one processes the information from the physical and emotional states of being is the determining factor. Multiple motivational strategies and team-building experiences were employed by the principal and promoted a positive emotional state for individuals and the collective environment. This aligned with Goddard et al.'s (2000) research suggesting heightening of efficacy occurs when teachers are able to process information from an experience or new challenge in a positive manner.

Participants not only shared ways school climate was influenced through purposeful actions by the principal but also ways participants shared the feeling of accountability for success of all students and teachers. Interview responses and observations during multiple meetings reflected the shared accountability perspective. Teachers collaborated with a focus on the success of all students. Bandura (1993) states collective efficacy beliefs were proven to positively influence the culture of the school through the commitment and actions of staff to ensure all students have the opportunity for success, and this dedication has occurred at the school.

These findings indicated the physiological state of the school were being influenced through school climate and shared accountability. When the majority of teachers are highly committed to student academic performance, the climate of the school will pressure teachers to persevere in their educational efforts to provide students the environment to reach success (Hoy et al., 2002). The ability of the principal to positively influence the physiological state of the school reflected her ability to build collective efficacy.

### **Principal Self-Efficacy Influenced Collective Efficacy**

The second theme, principal self-efficacy influenced collective efficacy, as reported in Chapter IV, was revealed first through data analysis and then supported by literature. Upon further analysis the subthemes building capacity and leading by example emerged. The subthemes explain the extent that principal self-efficacy beliefs influenced collective efficacy within the school.

#### **Finding 5: Building Capacity and Leading by Example**

This finding was revealed through interview data, observations, and the PSES. Evidence throughout the data concluded that principal self-efficacy beliefs influenced collective efficacy of the school. This finding aligned with literature emphasizing principals' sense of efficacy as a key to leadership influence on teaching and learning (Wahlstrom et al., 2010).

Sehgal et al.'s (2017) social cognitive and efficacy research literature revealed a positive correlation between principal leadership and teacher self-efficacy emphasizing the important role played by the principal in shaping the self-efficacy belief of a teacher. Autry (2010) furthers this research suggesting differences in principal behavior and efficacy will lead to differences in teachers' collective behavior and efficacy; differences in teachers' sense of collective efficacy will in turn impact student achievement. An effective principal can create collective efficacy through direct behaviors and practices that attempt to influence the processes of the group (McCormick, 2001). Additional findings also suggested that schools can enhance teacher effectiveness through self-efficacy beliefs by demonstrating their importance and providing an environment for collaboration among peers and support from the principal (Sehgal et al., 2017). A strong instructional leader can influence collective efficacy by providing opportunities for collaboration, as this strategy is a strategy for instructional improvement (Goddard et al., 2015).

The principal understood her role in influencing collective efficacy and those self-efficacy beliefs are supported through the purposeful opportunities and experiences provided to specifically build capacity. Mrs. Grady's self-efficacy beliefs aligned with literature stating successful leadership involves using social influence processes to organize, direct, and motivate the actions of others to accomplish results through their efforts on follower behavior (McCormick, 2001; Paglis, 2010). The findings revealed she understood and communicated what she expected of her school and staff; this is reflected through strategic modeling of the importance of a collaborative environment and providing that environment through supportive measures.

#### **Finding 6: Lack of Mastery Experiences**

This finding was revealed through interview data and focus group responses. Evidence throughout the data concluded that while the principal's self-efficacy beliefs reflected the ability to influence the collective efficacy of the school in relation to instruction, there was an absence of mastery experiences. Goddard et al. (2000) state mastery experiences are content-specific in one environment providing direct evidence that an individual can succeed at a single given task, and teachers do not feel equally efficacious in all teaching situations; there are strengths and weaknesses to consider.

Goddard's (2001) research stated mastery experiences are an important way to build collective efficacy in schools. The district provided new initiative trainings and professional development focused on the overarching goal of consistency among schools in both content and actual classroom instruction. Participants were required to attend these district-mandated trainings although follow-through of successful mastery in understanding, and that particular practice was not occurring within the school. There was no indication of follow-up to provide

feedback on the implementation of the specific strategies obtained through trainings and professional development to build efficacy through mastery experiences. Mastery experiences increase or decrease self-efficacy depending upon how the individual processes the information from the experience (Goddard et al., 2000). Participants shared that feedback received from walk-throughs or formal observations did not impact their feelings of competency in instructional ability; instead, they confirmed their feelings of efficacy resulting from prior learning. The differing role feedback had on mastery experiences for novice teachers was discussed within the focus group. Participants shared their belief that feedback may help to cultivate consistency in instructional practices among novice teachers reflective of the school but not the individual's capability in relation to instruction.

#### **Finding 7: Misconception of Shared Vision and Mission**

This finding was revealed through data from document reviews, interviews, and focus group responses. Evidence throughout the data concluded that while the principal's self-efficacy beliefs reflected the ability to influence the collective efficacy of the school in relation to the shared vision of the school, this was not actually occurring within the school. Focus group responses revealed that accreditation was the mission of the school. They recognized the immediate need to maintain accreditation but were unaware of the overarching mission and vision of the school. One participant shared that she remembered a team was organized to construct a shared mission and vision, but there is no evidence that this was conveyed among the staff. The documented mission/vision of the school was provided to them during the focus group, and all participants agreed that the mission/vision reflected a motto rather than a mission or vision.



In conclusion, the findings here related to the social cognitive theory research in the theoretical framework around the development of collective efficacy. The principal's self-efficacy beliefs and purposeful actions influenced collective efficacy development of the school. This was accomplished through the principal by ensuring fidelity of new initiative implementations focused on increasing student achievement and at the same time ensuring shaping of the environment to accomplish the verbalized goal of the school, maintaining accreditation. Through the creation of relationships, a positive climate, continued support and modeling, the principal has influenced and contributed to the development of collective efficacy at the school.

### **Implications for Practice**

This research uncovered seven major findings through the data analysis process. In this section I highlighted some implications for practice and steps a principal can take to become more strategic in creating collective efficacy within their school including: creating authentic mastery experiences and establishing a shared mission and vision of the school. While these implications are common in instructional leadership practices, below I will discuss how each will specifically benefit the school in regard to strategic collective efficacy development.

#### **Provide Mastery Experiences**

The first recommendation focuses on mastery experiences. The rate of teachers leaving the profession continues to be an issue in education and the use of mastery experiences has the potential to raise the efficacy of novice teachers. Novice teachers are trying to survive during their first few years and having the support of the principal may influence their efficacy. When new initiatives or strategies are introduced, teachers are expected to return to their classrooms and implement these new initiatives and strategies and follow-up needs to occur. While data

from study participants suggested that feedback had no impact on their efficacy, the literature in Chapter II supported the practice of providing mastery experiences to build collective efficacy within the school. A way that principal feedback may be seen as a significant source of efficacy would be through intentional and meaningful feedback to inform self-efficacy. Principals completing twice-a-year observations or quick-check walk-throughs to confirm specific strategies are in place does not provide meaningful feedback. The district and principal may be missing an opportunity to provide timely and meaningful feedback after new initiatives or strategies have been introduced to staff. Intentionally providing meaningful feedback creates mastery experiences for teachers and results in heightened efficacy.

### **Shared Mission and Vision**

The second recommendation is to develop a shared mission and vision statement based on the overarching goal of the school in relation to the success of the student body beyond a set academic achievement standard. Visions are public and reflect the values of the school and link stakeholders to the mission. A vision is intended to identify the kinds of learning to be achieved and is not solely focused on academic performance but reflects a diversity of priorities to include things like preparation for future employment and citizenship. The role of the mission is to inform the actions to achieve the vision. This study revealed there was not a clear and developed mission and vision of the school. The school improvement plan did reflect actions to improve academic performance, but it is not meant to replace the mission of a school. A school improvement plan is continually updated and based on ongoing performance data; therefore, it does not play the same role as a vision and mission statement. The creation of a shared mission and vision emerges in leadership practice research as a way to build capacity and create an understanding of the ultimate goal of the organization and not just a short-term, focused goal.

The lack of a substantive mission and vision provides the opportunity for misconceptions relating to the all-encompassing goal of the school and a missed opportunity to further develop collective efficacy.

### **Implications for Future Research**

This study exposed two implications for further research. Links have been made between principal self-efficacy, collective efficacy, and student achievement (Hoy et al., 2002; Sehgal et al., 2017; Tschannen-Moran et al., 1998), but more research on ways to help school leaders understand how their self-efficacy and behaviors can be successfully applied to struggling schools needs to occur. Continued research on the relationship between principal self-efficacy and collective efficacy through teacher perspectives should transpire, as it is limited to this point. Below I will discuss three specific areas for possible future research: mastery experiences, shared vision and mission, and achievement. The lack of the presence of mastery experiences and a shared vision and mission in this case study may be an isolated occurrence or a pattern among similar schools. In addition, the lack of presence may not have the impact that previous research has suggested. Lastly, achievement levels of the school in relation to student proficiency levels in English and math may not have been influenced by principal efficacy and warrants additional research.

#### **Mastery Experiences**

In this study any feedback provided on mastery instruction was identified as confirmation of performance and did not make the teachers feel more capable in their instructional abilities. Additional research to determine the influence mastery experiences have on novice teachers versus veteran teachers may provide insight to the role mastery experiences play in building collective efficacy dependent on length of experience. Another factor related to the influence of

mastery experiences on efficacy that would benefit from additional research is exploring the differences mastery experiences have on the efficacy of teachers who have experience but are new to a school with varying demographics and SES versus veteran teachers who are not new to the school. Lastly, exploring the impact of general required observations and feedback to meet requirements of licensure and continued contracts versus meaningful and strategic feedback based on providing the opportunity to create mastery experiences to heighten efficacy is an area that would benefit from further research. The suggested research areas of mastery experiences may further support Bandura's (1997) research on social cognitive theory and sources of efficacy or provide additional findings reflective of the significance mastery experiences influence efficacy in regard to different contexts.

### **Shared Vision and Mission**

In this study, the need for maintaining accreditation was perceived as the mission and vision of the school and staff placed full effort into reaching this goal. The findings revealed staff believed their mission and vision was accreditation, which is ultimately an immediate goal based on school improvement processes. The critical need of the school to focus on increasing achievement and maintaining accreditation may be all a low SES school needs to concentrate on, but an appropriate vision and mission of a school encompasses a diversity of priorities reflective of what the child as a whole needs to become a productive citizen in the community. Studies to explore the influence a fully developed and understood mission and vision statement versus a centralized focus on meeting a specific standard has on a school with low SES may provide further insight on leadership practice and collective efficacy research. Additionally, these types of studies may provide additional findings of the role a shared mission and vision plays in building collective efficacy specifically in a low SES school compared to the current research

literature suggesting that a shared vision and mission is essential for a collaborative learning community for all schools.

### **Achievement**

The case study site did increase achievement over the last five years to ultimately reach state accountability standards for accreditation. However, the growth was essentially maintained over the last three years in English while increasing and decreasing in math by up to ten points yearly over the last four years. The participating school district instituted a four-year comprehensive strategic plan in 2016 to address the mission of ensuring academic excellence for all students through key goals and performance measures. This plan included ensuring a guaranteed and viable curriculum to ensure alignment in lesson design and delivery of curriculum, along with enhancing alignment of assessments with curriculum. In addition, a comprehensive Response to Intervention database was created to be used by teachers for the tiering of students. The expectation of the implementation of these district-wide initiatives was increased achievement and closing achievement gaps among other state standards of accountability. While this case study site was able to make growth over the last five years and achieve and maintain accreditation for the last three years in English and math, this may be due to the district-wide changes and not the influence of the principal on collective efficacy.

Additional suggested future research would include investigating the maintenance of accreditation in English by two to four points above the state standards for the last three years, together with the variance in math achievement scores over the last four years of the case study site compared to the district. This may help to understand the minimal growth after student proficiency levels in state accreditation standards in English were met and how the variance in math scores were influenced, whether through the new curriculum, collective efficacy and

principal influence, or both. In addition, the case site principal has led the school for eight years. Research-based leadership practices are in place, but they may not actually be influencing the achievement piece. Since the gains have occurred over the past four years, this may provide insight that the principal did not impact achievement and the district-wide curriculum implementation was the change agent influencing achievement.

### **Conclusion**

The teachers who participated in this study helped to unveil perceptions related to particular beliefs and actions of a school principal who created collective efficacy contributing to elevating school climate in a high-poverty while providing educational possibilities that improved teaching and learning in which they work. All participants were passionate about their work and committed to the success of the school. They all knew what they should be doing individually and collectively to be successful.

The purpose of this study was to examine the development of collective efficacy of elementary school teachers. The focus was specifically designed to examine how the beliefs and actions of a school principal contribute to the shaping of collective efficacy in a high-poverty school while providing educational possibilities that improve teaching and learning through the perspectives of teachers. The review of literature and evidence provided through this study exposed that the principal fostered experiences reflective of three of the four self-efficacy sources. In addition, the self-efficacy beliefs of the principal also influenced the collective efficacy development in regard to building capacity and leading by example. The principal missed the mark on including mastery experiences for teachers and the creation and understanding of a shared mission and vision. The document review, interviews, and focus group responses validated the need for future research in the area of mastery experiences and the

creation and understanding of a shared mission and vision in schools reflecting the same criteria as this case study site. Two questions guided this study: What experiences/elements influence the school's collective efficacy? How has the self-efficacy of the principal contributed to the school's collective efficacy and influenced achievement? This study has been concluded by responding to these questions based on findings presented earlier in this chapter.

The outcome of this research revealed the principal's self-efficacy beliefs influenced experiences that contributed to collective efficacy development. The experiences and influence of the principal on collective efficacy provided the ability for the school to overcome barriers that are typically associated with low SES schools. The functioning of this school with high collective efficacy influenced attainment and maintenance of student proficiency state standards for accreditation in English and math. Teachers shared stories and recollections that supported collective efficacy development and further explained how school reached accreditation in lieu of its low SES. It is also to be noted that the lack of mastery experiences and shared mission and vision did not allow for analysis of their impact on collective efficacy development to be determined. The themes identified in the findings of this study need to be explored by more districts within similar school sites to decrease the gap in knowledge of principal influence on collective efficacy resulting in increased achievement.

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## APPENDIX B

## TEACHER INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

1. Tell me about yourself.
  - a. Why did you get into teaching?
  - b. What do you enjoy about teaching?
  - c. Discuss your professional experience (previous experiences, socioeconomic contexts, demographic contexts).
2. Tell me about your school.
  - a. Academic performance, socioeconomics, demographics, size
  - b. Working relationships with your colleagues/collaborative environment?
3. How would you describe staff morale at your school?
  - a. Relationships between teachers
  - b. Relationships between teachers/administration
4. What are the challenges you face as a teacher and as a school?
  - a. Why do you believe these challenges are present?
  - b. How are some of these challenges addressed at the building level?
5. What impact has accreditation had on your job as a teacher? As a school?
6. What do you attribute to your school's success in moving from partial accreditation to full accreditation over the last 3 years (staff development, changes in instructional practices, etc.)?
7. Can you discuss how you believe these changes were implemented school-wide?
  - a. Are these shared beliefs and/or practices? To what extent?

8. Can you describe how school improvement programs/strategies initiated to improve academic success have been introduced and implemented?
  - a. What do you believe were the most significant programs/strategies in raising achievement? Why?
  - b. Were there strategies used to motivate teachers in supporting these school improvement implementations?
9. What types of staff development are provided to teachers at the school?
  - a. How would you describe the commitment of teachers to staff development opportunities?
  - b. Why do you think the commitment is low/high?
10. What frustrations have been experienced in the school improvement process?
  - a. How do you believe staff handles these frustrations/difficulties to realize academic success?
11. How have your beliefs/attitudes changed over the last 4 years?
  - a. Can you elaborate on these changes? Why have your beliefs/attitudes changed?



## APPENDIX C

### FOCUS GROUP QUESTIONS

1. Do you feel your principal influences your level of competency in instruction? Whether it is positive or negative, can you please describe how this occurs.
2. Do you believe that you understand the goals set forth for the school (follow-up to explore the understanding of the school's mission and vision, the big picture, versus single goal of maintaining accreditation)?
3. Is there anything else that you want to share that you feel helps produce the success that is occurring here?

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